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MARCH 2010

the
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LIVING
DIRECTORS

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John Forté, Ashley Gorley, Lukasz "Dr. Luke" Gottwald
Christian Jacobs & Scott Schultz (Yo Gabba Gabba!), Ron Jones
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EDITORIAL

BY JOSH JACKSON

THE 50 BEST LIVING DIRECTORS

Almost four years ago, *Paste* ranked the 100 Best Living Songwriters. The accompanying essays generated countless discussions and a renewed—even *new*—appreciation for those masters of songcraft. It was a modest shot across the bow of ubiquitous pop singers, raising a banner for often underappreciated songwriters.

Now we're giving cinema the same treatment. Our culture is obsessed with the celebrity of actors, and their faces become as familiar as those of our own families. But at *Paste*, we reserve our greatest appreciation for the filmmakers behind the movies we love, particularly those auteurs who dream up whole worlds—and the adventures within.

So in this issue, we celebrate the 50 Best Living Directors. It was painfully difficult narrowing the list down from the nearly 150 candidates nominated by our writers and staff. The result is an eclectic batch of moviemakers who range in age from 38 to 88, and who represent 15 different countries. We didn't set out to pick the most successful (though James Cameron and Steven Spielberg have put a few bucks in studios' pockets), the most obscure (though people are just beginning to discover the genius of Charles Burnett) or the most arty (though France's Left Bank is well represented). We just picked those whose films make us ponder, laugh, cry and simply sit in awe.

I'm writing this from Park City, Utah, at the Sundance Film Festival, where droves of directors are standing on the shoulders of these 50 giants. Festivals like Sundance have called attention to many of the directors on this list, and have given more than a few their start. Even now, filmmakers like *Catfish*'s Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman continue to break their own new ground. So while our list omits younger talents like Spike Jonze, Michel Gondry and the filmmaking team of Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck—who we believe are on their way to becoming masters—we're heartened to know that they, like so many others at Sundance and beyond, are taking motion pictures to new artistic heights. When we reassess this list in a decade, they'll likely be on it.

Join the discussion at PasteMagazine.com to let us know what you think makes a great director, who was overlooked and who's overrated. Our hope isn't that you'll completely agree with us—it's that you'll discover some amazing films, and the men and women who made them.

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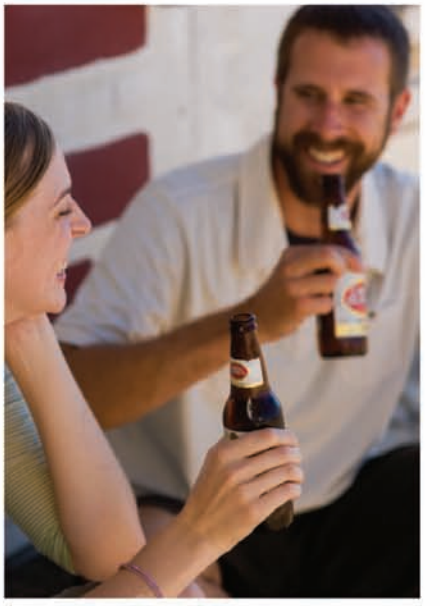

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INBOX

INDIE'S DEAD. WHO CARES?!

There are journalists in Mexico who are being kidnapped and murdered in search of reporting violent drug cartels. Maybe think about that before you write another lame culturally self-aggrandizing non-story about a niche whose death concerns no one and affects nothing. **ANTONIO** { via web }

GOOD RIDDANCE

I come to indie from the alternative and new wave movements, stretching back toward punk and even the "edgier" (please don't shoot me, Jim Jarmusch!) side of classic rock. I guess these labels serve some purpose for someone, but not me. I'm not saying I'm impervious or above the influence of labels. When I hear the term "indie rock snob," I tend to get defensive, probably due more to the good qualities I personally associate with indie and less due to the fact that there are, indeed, quite a few indie rock snobs out there. Along with *American Idol* snobs, and jazz snobs, etc. No, the label thing hasn't worked for me in a long time. If you must label, go ahead. It won't affect me. I'll continue to call it as I see it. **GARY** { via web }

THE REAL DEAL

"Authentic" music should only be defined as music that is what the artist alone wants to produce. Period. If this artist is loved by just 300 people, fine. If the artist is discovered by 300 million people, fine. Being discovered by the masses doesn't make them any less authentic. The people who turn on a favorite artist as soon as someone they consider un-cool knows about them are no better than the ones who love the Disney-manufactured "stars" singing committee-written music through voice-processors trying to make money before they outgrow their cute-kid status. Music is supposed to move your soul. Like the music because it feels good to listen to, not because you think it's cool to like it. **THOMAS** { via web }

ROCK-A-BYE

I have been subscribing for about a year now. *Love* the mag. Last night my three-year-old daughter went to sleep with the latest issue face up on her chest as if she were reading it (and perhaps she was). We took a pic, and thought we'd offer it to you. Keep up the great work! **TOBIAS SCHLUETER** { Chicago }

OVERLOOKED THE XX...

I always look forward to buying "Best Of" magazines during this time of year, and you guys are the first I look for. You sure took the wind of out my sails when I saw you left The xx out of your "Best Albums of 2009" choices! They created a flawless and beautiful combination of simplicity and depth with their self-titled debut, and it simply should not—and cannot—be ignored. **MICHAEL SAKAS** { via email }

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Kevin Barnes thrusts Of Montreal into the spotlight
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Eternal Sunshine screenwriter takes us inside his directorial debut
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TWENTY-FOUR free SONGS
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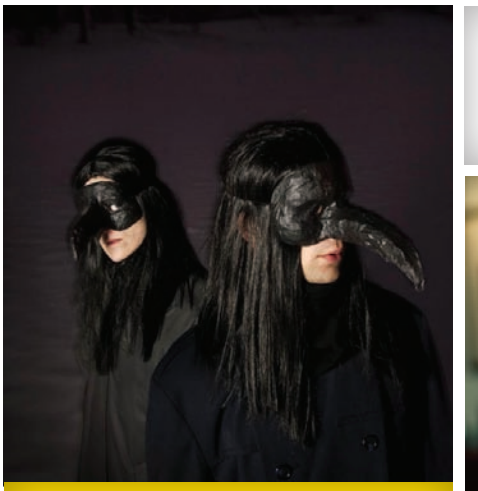

Reviews of new movies like *The Runaways* and *The Wolfman*, plus our favorites from Sundance 2010. New music from The Knife (above) and Ted Leo, plus a collaboration from David Byrne and Fatboy Slim. Also, get a free MP3 from Justin Townes Earle (right) and a video from Laura Gibson (below) & Ethan Rose.

Add your own user rating to anything reviewed in this issue!

Live performances from Ryan Montbleau Band (left) and Brendan Benson

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NEW MUSIC SAMPLER

1. GOLDFRAPP "Rocket (Radio Edit)"

(A.Goldfrapp / W.Gregory) from *Head First* ℗Warner Chappell Publishing. Mute. **Hometown:** Bath, England **Website:** www.goldfrapp.com **(PG. 61)**

2. THE WHIGS "In The Dark"

(P.Gisbert / J.Derio / T.Denux) from *In The Dark* ℗2010 Hot Waltz (ASCAP). Courtesy of ATO Records. **Hometown:** Athens, Ga. **Website:** www.thewhigs.com **(PG. 59)**

3. LOCAL NATIVES "Sun Hands"

from *Gorilla Manor* ℗2010 Universal Publishing (ASCAP). Courtsy of Frenchkiss Records. **Hometown:** Los Angeles **Website:** www.localnatives.com **(PGS. 22, 59)**

4. ANAIS MITCHELL FEAT. BEN KNOX MILLER, ANI DIFRANCO, JUSTIN VERNON, & THE CHORUS "Way Down Hadestown"

from *Hadestown* ℗2010 Treleven Music (ASCAP). admin. by Candid Music Publishing. Courtesy of Righteous Babe Records. **Website:** www.anaismitchell.com

5. BEN SOLLEE & DANIEL MARTIN MOORE "Something, Somewhere, Sometime"

(B. Sollee) from *Dear Companion* ℗2010 pub Blast! (BMI) Courtesy of Sub Pop Records. **Hometown:** Louisville and Cold Springs, Ky. **Website:** www.subpop.com/artists/ben_sollee_and_daniel_martin_moore **(PG. 61)**

6. SALLY SELTMANN "Harmony To My Heartbeat" from *Heart That's Pounding* ℗2010 Runaway Music. Courtesy of Arts & Crafts Productions. **Hometown:** Sydney **Website:** www.sallyseltmann.com **(PG. 23)**

7. ROGUE WAVE "Good Morning"

(Z.Rogue) from *Permalight* ℗2010 Clean Your Homefish Music. Courtesy of Brushfire Records. **Hometown:** Oakland, Calif. **Website:** www.roguewavemusic.com

8. JOE PUG "Unsophisticated Heart"

(J. Pug) from *Messenger* ℗2010 Joe Pug Music (BMI). Courtesy of Lightning Rod Records.**Hometown:** Chicago **Website:** www.joepugmusic.com **(PG. 57)**

9. ROCKY VOTOLATO "Red River"

(R.Votolato) from *True Devotion* ℗2010 J is for Jerk Publishing (ASCAP). Courtesy of Barsuk Records. **Hometown:** Seattle **Website:** www.rockyvotolato.com **(PG. 60)**

10. NNEKA "Kangpe (feat. Wesley Williams)"

(N. Egbuna / DJ Farhot) from *Concrete Jungle* ℗2008 Bushqueer Music. Courtesy of Yo Mama's Recording Company. **Hometown:** Warri, Nigeria **Website:** www.nnekaworld.com **(PG. 26)**

11. JASON COLLETT "Love Is A Dirty Word"

(J. Collett) from *Rat A Tat Tat* ℗2010 Arts & Crafts Music (SOCAN). Courtesy of Arts & Crafts Productions. **Hometown:** Toronto **Website:** www.arts-crafts.ca/jasoncollett/index2.php

12. CITAY "Careful With That Hat"

from *Dream Get Together* ℗2010 Barely Regal (BMI). Admin by Thompkins Square. Courtesy of Dead Oceans. **Website:** www.deadoceans.com **(PG. 25)**

13. XIU XIU "Cumberland Gap"

from *Dear God, I Hate Myself.* Traditional. Courtesy of Kill Rock Stars. **Hometown:** San Francisco **Website:** www.xiuxiu.org **(PG. 61)**

14. MADISON VIOLET "Small Of My Heart"

(B. MacEachern / L. MacIsaac) from *No Fool For Trying* ℗ 2009 Mummy Dust Music, Ltd (SOCAN). Courtesy of True North Records **Hometown:** Toronto **Website:** www.madisonviolet.com

15. ADAM GREEN "What Makes Him Act So Bad" (A.Green) from *Minor Love* ℗2009 AverageCabbage Music. Courtesy of Fat Possum Records. **Hometown:** New York **Website:** www.myspace.com/adamgreen1

16. BACKYARD TIRE FIRE "Good To Be"

(E. Anderson) from *Good To Be* ℗2010 Kelsey Street Music (ASCAP). Courtesy of Kelsey Street Records. **Hometown:** Bloomington, Ill. **Website:** www.backyardtirefire.com

17. DAWN LANDES "Young Girl"

(D.Landes) from *Sweet Heart Rodeo* ℗2009 Fun Machine Music (BMI). Courtesy of Cooking Vinyl Records. **Hometown:** Louisville, Ky. **Website:** www.dawnlandes.com **(PG. 57)**

18. MATTHEW RYAN "Your Museum"

(M.Ryan) from *Dear Lover* ℗2009 Plastic Violin (BMI). Courtesy of The Dear Future Collective. **Hometown:** West View, Tenn. **Website:** www.matthewryanonline.com

19. JOSH ROUSE "I Will Live On Islands"

(J. Rouse) from *El Turista* ℗2010 Bedroom Classics / Yep Records. **Hometown:** Nashville, Tenn. **Website:** www.joshrouse.com **(PG. 57)**

20. THESE NEW PURITANS "Orion"

(J.Bennett) from *Hidden* ℗2010 Domino Publishing Company of America, Inc. Courtesy of Domino Record Co. **Hometown:** Southend-on-Sea, England **Website:** www.thesenewpuritans.com **(PG. 59)**

BONUS DOWNLOADS

21. PACKWAY HANDLE BAND "Outskirts" (M.Paynter) from *What Are We Gonna Do Now* ℗2010 (BMI). **Hometown:** Athens, Ga. **Website:** www.packwayhandle.com

22. POST HARBOR "Shirakashi"

from *They Can't Hurt You if You Don't Believe in Them* ℗2010 postharbor (ASCAP). Courtesy of Burning Building Recordings. **Hometown:** Seattle **Website:** www.postharbormusic.com

23. KOWALSKI "Get Back"

(L. Price / P. Conn / T. O'Hara / P. Baird) ℗2009 Dear Bird Records. **Hometown:** Bangor, Northern Ireland **Website:** www.wearekowalski.com

24. KEN WILL MORTON "Breathe"

(K. Morton) from *True Grit* ℗2010 Kenneth William Morton Publishing (BMI). Courtesy of Sojourn Records. **Hometown:** Athens, Ga. **Website:** www.kenwillmorton.com

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NATALIE MERCHANT, GIL SCOTT-HERON, **TOY INSTRUMENTS** AND VIKING POTTERY

BADU TO THE BONE
SOUL DIVA SCALES BACK

Erykah Badu lets her muse come by degrees. She works patiently, like a monk or a sculptor or a...sandwich artist? "It's like Subway sandwiches," she says. "All the bread first, then all the lettuce, all the tomatoes. Nothing's finished until everything's there. It takes a lot of time to do the things that I do. I give myself that time."

Five years passed between Badu's 2003 record *Worldwide Underground* and 2008's blindsiding *New Amerykah Part One (4th World War)*, one of the most ambitious albums in recent memory. Its woolly arrangements and subject matter made for Badu's most overtly political and socially minded disc, and startled even longtime fans. Now, at relatively blinding speed, we get the final *New Amerykah* installment, *Part Two (Return of the Ankh)*, a project closer to her 1997 debut, *Baduizm*. The new set features torch singing and heavy arrangements that lean on piano and bass, but it also takes some of the sharp left turns that defined its predecessor. *Part Two* is the yang to *Part One*'s yin.

The first disc reveled in heavy processing, and the second is hardly all-the-way-live (note the disorienting bass drops on three-part finale "Out My Mind Just in Time," and the 3D sample trickery of the Karriem Riggins-produced "Fall in Love"). Nevertheless, the new one is, as Badu puts it, "very analog. After I recorded digitally and dumped everything back onto two-inch tape, it made me think of some of the older things that moved me in that kind of way." One lingering element is the subtle use of theremin, which wends into the background of a number of songs, thickening the album's 1970s flavor. "I tend to want to tell a story sonically," Badu says, "as much as I do lyrically."

For both *New Amerykah* projects, she recorded a huge batch of songs and then sorted them on her laptop, sifting through some 70 demos recorded to GarageBand. "Some of them were not finished vocally, but it all had to feel alike. I was in a very sociopolitical place at some points in the writing, and a very emotional, energetic, romantic point in some parts of the writing. I was beginning to separate them—stems from seed, if you will," says the Dallas-based singer, who turned 39 last month. "It took more time listening than actually composing. I was having to interpret the mumbling I was doing—'What am I trying to say? What am I trying to do?' It's almost like another artist or another person I'm trying to figure out."

In some cases, that other person takes on a life of her own, as on "Get Money," a lampoon of hip-hop and R&B's crass materialism ("I'm drinking your gin / I'm fucking your friends") that came out of a studio jam session. "It's funny to me because that's so anti what I feel or think," Badu says. The jazzy soul of "Window Seat" is a semi throwback featuring a lyrical nod to a fellow Texas native: "On this porch rockin' / Like Lightnin' Hopkins."

"Lightnin' Hopkins sits on the porch and sings blues, for the most part," Badu says. "I'm singing these blues, but I'd rather be beamed up by Scotty."

MICHAELANGELO MATOS

Photo by Marc Baptiste

GIL SCOTT-HERON
MY FIRST...

The revolution still isn't on your flat panel, but hip-hop godfather and author Gil Scott-Heron is back with *I'm New Here*, an album produced by XL Recordings owner Richard Russell, who soaks the 60-year-old poet/jazzman's lyrics in a Burial-meets-Portishead brine. On this stark 28-minute set, Scott-Heron covers both Robert Johnson and Smog, and touts the sublime strength of the grandmother who raised him. And in a nod to the artistic drought spurred by his run-ins with the law and reported ill health, Scott-Heron drops this telling line: "If you've got to pay for things you've done wrong, I got a big bill comin'." Shortly before dropping his first album in 16 years—and the first since his latest drug-related jail stint—he spoke with *Paste* about some other life milestones. **JIM WELTE**

FIRST MEMORY OF HIS GRANDMOTHER: "My grandmother raised me down in Jackson, Tennessee. I remember that I got a pair of roller skates and she tied a pillow around my behind. I was trying to skate across the living room, and every time I fell I landed right about where she put it."

FIRST REGRET: "There was a lady who lived down the street from us, and she was actually my grandfather's sister, which I didn't know at the time. Down South everybody calls each other cousin or aunt-this, uncle-that. I knew her as Aunt Sissy, but I didn't know anything more than that. Had I known that she was actually my grandfather's sister, I could have found out a lot more about my grandfather, who died before I was born. I wish I knew that and could have gotten more information about him."

FIRST FAVORITE SONG: "'Jamaica Farewell' by Harry Belafonte. I sang that in the second grade at the talent show. I had no idea at the time that it had a connection to my [Jamaica-born] father and to where I had actually come from.

FIRST MUSICAL COLLABORATION: "I sang with another guy in the fifth grade. We did Ritchie Valens' 'Donna.' We did pretty good, and then we sang another one, and we were less than successful."

FIRST THING HE DID THE LAST TIME HE GOT OUT OF JAIL: "It was colder than a whore is hot, and I wanted to get out of the cold. That's what it was."

FIRST REGULAR GIG: "I used to play at these coffee shops that had a lot of people on the show. I wouldn't say they came to see me. They saw me in spite of themselves."

FIRST TIME HE WAS PROUD: "I saw my mother perform with the New York Oratorial Society. They used to do the *Messiah* at Carnegie Hall and I went to see her do that. That was a very proud moment. Also, when I finished [1970 novel] *The Vulture*—because I had set out to do something that I really wanted to finish. I had never finished a project of that size and length before."

FIRST TIME HE HEARD A SAMPLE OF ONE OF HIS SONGS: "It was P.M. Dawn's 'Paper Doll.' They sampled 'Angola, Louisiana,' and I couldn't imagine it in advance, but when I heard it I had understood what they done. They sampled the intro, but the way they did it was unique and it sounded pretty good."

FIRST THING HE DID TODAY: "Answered the phone. I had been working until very late last night, and the phone started ringing this morning, and it was Mimi, the lady who makes sure I'm still alive every day. She was calling to make sure I'm still alive today. Otherwise I'd believe some of these rumors out there of me being dead."

Photo by Mischa Baptiste

POLISHING THE SILVER
A USER'S GUIDE TO THE RE-BRANDED SENIOR CITIZEN

It's difficult to remember now, but at one time the idea of Rick Rubin producing a Johnny Cash record by stripping down his sound and including Leonard Cohen and Danzig covers was considered novel, bordering on revolutionary if not completely insane. The American Recordings series ultimately granted Cash immortality, of course, and it also kickstarted a small but lively movement: matching older artists—ranging from "aged" to "forgotten"—with younger, hipper producers in an attempt to reach a younger, hipper crowd. Here's a look at how some recent examples have fared. **JEFF VRABEL | ILLUSTRATION BY SAM BOSMA**

	MOSE ALLISON *The Way of the World*	**NEIL DIAMOND** *12 Songs*	**AL GREEN** *Lay It Down*	**LORETTA LYNN** *Van Lear Rose*	**PORTER WAGONER** *Wagonmaster*
PRODUCER	JOE HENRY	RICK RUBIN	?UESTLOVE, JAMES POYSER	JACK WHITE	MARTY STUART
LABEL/ YEAR	Anti-, 2010	Sony, 2005	Blue Note, 2008	Interscope, 2004	Anti-, 2007
ARTIST'S AGE	82	64	62	69	79
CONCEIT	Producer Joe Henry has helmed recent work by Allen Toussaint, Bettye LaVette and Ramblin' Jack Elliott. To coax wry hipster-pianist Allison back into the studio for the first time in 12 years, Henry emailed his pitch letters to Allison's wife, who printed them for Mose to read at the breakfast table.	In what almost seemed like a dare, Rubin applied the American Recordings concept to a singer who had long existed at the precise midpoint between sheer magnificence and hideous terror.	Late-night TV's most versatile drummer and his Roots colleague, keyboardist Poyser, drape the Reverend's most recent sermons in smooth sonics. Along for the ride: descendants and acolytes like John Legend, Corinne Bailey Rae, Anthony Hamilton and the Dap-King Horns.	Punk/blues howler White directs a dirt-road country album by a long-grounded songbird, causing fans in three or four different musical orbits to completely lose their minds.	A Nashville studio legend revives the long-forgotten, Joker-outfitted country singer, and just in time: Wagoner died less than five months after the album's release.
WHY IT WORKED	Allison remains sharp as broken glass, needling organized religion in "Modest Proposal," covering Loudon Wainwright ("I'm Alright") and hosting a jaunty cerebral walking tour in "My Brain," while surrounded by the comforts of guitar, mandolin and brushed drums.	Though *12 Songs* doesn't revel in the utter rawness Rubin found with Cash, it's a shockingly strong set of miniature epics like "Oh Mary," "Evermore" and "Save Me A Saturday Night," which find Diamond letting his voice drift into an endearing rustle.	Green's 824th record of opulent soul isn't the dramatic reinvention or full-on transfusion some might have hoped for, but why tinker with perfection?	White's garage-grit tendencies could have served to balance out Lynn's vintage Nashville sweetness, but instead they dirtied her up on this, her 70th record but only her second self-penned effort.	Wagoner's baritone is a shadow of its former self, but its faded fragility adds welcome creepers to tracks like "The Late Love of Mine" and "Committed To Parkview."

EARS WE TRUST

Steve Wertheimer

Steve Wertheimer has owned The Continental Club—arguably the greatest music club in Austin, Texas—for 23 years. Here's what he's listening to and loving.

JOHN HAMMOND, JR. ***Wicked Grin***
I have purchased more copies of this record than any other, and given them away to friends to turn them on to one of my all-time favorites: The legendary John Hammond, Jr. backed by Tom Waits' band, playing Tom Waits songs, produced by Waits. It's truly wicked.

LED ZEPPELIN ***Led Zeppelin II***
What can I say that hasn't been said? This is an album you play as loud as you can without damaging any property.

ZZ TOP ***Tres Hombres***
Hats off to the Little Ol' Band from Texas—after more than four decades making the best Texas boogie, they're still going strong. "La Grange" is the Lone Star State's national anthem, and I listen to this record while cruisin' the highway with the windows down in my '51 Merc.

SOUTHERN CULTURE ON THE SKIDS
Dirt Track Date
This record captures one of the best bar bands touring today. They're a blast in concert, and *Dirt Track* contains many of their hits: "Soul City," "Nitty Gritty," "8 Piece Box," "Voodoo Cadillac" and more.

PROFESSOR LONGHAIR
Rock 'N' Roll Gumbo
This gentleman (aka Henry Roeland Byrd or Roy Byrd) changed my life after I saw him for the first time in 1977 in New Orleans. I witnessed his magic many more times until he died young in 1980, just as his star was rising. This great record features calypso, jazz, funk, Afro-Cuban, rock 'n' roll, blues or whatever you want to call it. To me, it's "party music." He influenced so many of the New Orleans greats: Fats, Booker, Allen Toussaint, Dr. John. Toussaint put it best, "He's the Bach of rock."

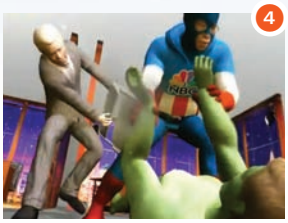
the PASTE 7

OUR FAVORITE ENTERTAINING BITS OF WHATEVER

1 Nick Marino, Managing Editor → *Momofuku* by David Chang and Peter Meehan Chang's cooking is a revelation, and so is his first book. Packed with jaw-dropping photography and intimate writing, it's equal parts cookbook, coffee-table tome and memoir. And yes, it includes the recipe for Momofuku's coveted pork buns.

2 Rachael Maddux, Associate Editor → Vintage Danish viking pottery
"Four-inch stoneware saucer" and "kinda badass" aren't words you usually hear together, but Danish ceramics company Nymolle brings the phrases together. Check eBay or Etsy for these vintage stoneware pieces featuring Paul Hoyrup's illustrations of Nordic villages, dueling vikings and scythe-weiding peasants.

3 Josh Jackson, Editor-in-Chief → *Kill Screen*
The videogame world deserves thoughtful analysis now that games are every bit as morally and visually complex as film, and the debut issue of this magazine (founded by former *Paste* contributors Jamin Brophy-Warren and Chris Dahlen) fits the bill. It's *The Atlantic* of videogame rags. **KillScreenMagazine.com**



4 Michael Saba, Assistant Editor → *Apple Daily*'s "animated roundups"
This Taiwanese newspaper intermittently posts computer-animated summaries of American pop culture on its website. The implied Chinese perception of the U.S. is even more hilarious and disturbing than the uncanny valley effect. **NextMedia.com**

5 Nick Purdy, Publisher → Mexican Coca-Cola You probably haven't had a Coke made with with real cane sugar since the 1980s—since then, sweetening has come from the much cheaper high-fructose corn syrup. But now that Costco is stocking Coke produced in Mexico, where cane sugar is still used, you can conveniently taste the *real* "real thing."

6 Kate Kiefer, Senior Contributing Writer → ThreePotatoFourShop.com
Looking for a vintage classroom wall map? A restored 1950s typewriter? An antique nautical life preserver? A repurposed Teflon drum bin? This husband-and-wife-run website is the eclectic collector's dream. It's like someone went to the flea market and picked out all the good stuff for you.

7 Austin L. Ray, Web Editor → Freddie Gibbs
Freddie Gibbs is a very talented, no-nonsense rapper from Gary, Ind. He was dropped from Interscope and released two monolithic mixtapes in the summer of 2009. Expect big things from this guy.

Pottery photo by Hiu Lee

OUR TIME IN RHINECLIFF

A WINTER'S DAY IN UPSTATE NEW YORK WITH NATALIE MERCHANT

Natalie Merchant is holding the door for me as I enter the train station. I've just pulled into Rhinecliff, a quaint Hudson Valley town roughly 90 minutes outside of Manhattan, and Merchant has come to pick me up. She's wearing the oversized sunglasses I remember from a photo of her performing at the opening of Poets House in New York last September, and she's as tiny as I've read: 5 foot 1 and slight underneath her long quilted down coat. "It's 14 degrees!" she says.

I follow her to her car, thinking about how 20 years ago, she graced MTV in her vintage dresses, her bobbed hair blue-black and her lipstick retro red, dancing through the 10,000 Maniacs hit "Like the Weather." Now 46, she has since become a platinum-selling solo artist, a longtime resident of the Hudson Valley and, as of 2003, a mom. And now here we are, driving to a cafe in her Volvo station wagon.

It's been a long six years since her last studio album, *The House Carpenter's Daughter*, and this month she's staging an ambitious return. *Leave Your Sleep* is a genre-spanning collection of poems Merchant has set to music with help from a wildly disparate cast of collaborators—some 130 artists, including Wynton Marsalis, Lúnasa and The Klezmatics, The Memphis Boys and Medeski Martin & Wood. Merchant sent the artists demos early on, but the songs—recorded in an ensemble setting with no rehearsal—often changed shape. "'Calico Pie' started out as a jig," Merchant tells me after we settle in at our table. "And then it turned out to be a bluegrass song. When we did 'Sweet and a Lullaby,' as an experiment we played that one song in about 10 different styles."

Merchant began the project five years ago and personally selected all of the poems. The majority are about childhood, and date from the Victorian era. She hired three research assistants to track down biographical data about the authors, and a fourth assistant to research photos. "My favorite part was the picture research," Merchant says. "I've collected antique photographs for over 30 years, so I'm really fascinated by old photographs. I had a deep desire to know who these people were and what they looked like."

She self-financed *Sleep*, and last fall teamed with Nonesuch Records to release it. "It just got to the point where it was too big and too much. They were the only label I considered because I knew they'd understand the project." (She appears on another 2010 Nonesuch release—David Byrne's Imelda Marcos–inspired opus, *Here Lies Love*—to be released this month.) Merchant's own album will come in two versions: a "cheap and cheerful" 16-track CD, and a 26-song, 60-plus-page deluxe edition. She'll tour "modestly" in support of the album, including a library tour starting in April at the New York Public Library that will be part performance and part lecture—at this point, she knows these poets' lives by heart.

We're back in the Volvo now, returning to the train station. I ask about Merchant's musical preferences. Does she like metal? Nope. "Roxy Music—that's as hard rock as I get," she says, and then slips in a CD from yet another Nonesuch labelmate. "Do you know Low Anthem?" There's a pause while the car fills with Ben Knox Miller's pillowy vocals. "This is what exurban moms listen to," she says with a laugh. If only, Natalie. If only.

KRISTINA FELICIANO

Photo by Marion Ettlinger

TOYS ON THE SIDE

German toy collector Eric Schneider began accumulating his treasures about a decade ago, and at this point he has some 250—mostly 1970s and '80s relics from Hong Kong by way of eBay. "Most of the stuff is very cheap," he says, "because nobody's interested." All the more reason to publish a book about them—*Toy Instruments* (out now). Here, Schneider tells us the story behind some of our favorites.

NICK MARINO

SKATEBOARD ORGAN

"I got this from a friend in America. He was also collecting some musical toys and he was doing music with these things. And I was interested in the interesting shape because I have never seen this before. A skateboard, yeah. What to say about it? It's extremely cheap Hong Kong stuff."

TRANSFORMERS ELECTRONIC VOICE SYNTHESIZER

"You can use it musically, but I think it was not intended to be musical. It was to make robot voices. But this one it has little sound generators in it. It creates one tone, like a motor in a car."

CASIO CK-200 KEYBOARD

"When you see this, you think you can play to the music of the radio. But this is impossible with this machine. You can play, or you can listen to the radio—you cannot mix the two. It's frustrating. I don't know why they decided to do that, because it was not difficult to mix the sounds."

MNA PIANO WATCH

"There's a section of these piano watches. I got three of them. This is the biggest one. It doesn't work."

REMCO ELECTRONIC SOUND FX MACHINE

"I think it is one of the most complex musical toys I've ever seen. As you can see in the box, it was intended to create realistic sounds—like trains, cars, horses. Hmm. I haven't tried to make a horse with it because the sounds are very abstract and very aggressive."

MICHAEL JACKSON SOUND MACHINE"

This is a category I started to collect maybe five or four years ago. In America they are called sing-a-longs, and in Japan they are described as a typical karaoke toy. It's just a simple amplifier with a microphone. And sometimes these things do include a radio, so you can listen to a radio and sing to the radio. But this Michael Jackson one, it's only an amplifier, so you can only sing with your voice a little bit louder, and that's it."

SILVER STAR ORP-1803 ORGAN

"It's kind of an entertainment station where you've got all in one. I think this idea is always coming in electronic culture—like in mobile phones where everything is included, or the iPhone or something like that. And I think these machines are in some ways prototypes, to get more function in [a] small space."

HIT STIX

"Not very impressive. You need two watches, as you can see on the box, to impress with this toy."

➥ Photos © Eric Schneider

LOST IN THE SHUFFLE

BY MAURA JOHNSTON ILLUSTRATION BY EDWARD MCGOWAN

For most of my music-consuming life, my collection has had an imposing physical component. I crammed huge racks of CDs into tiny dorm rooms and slightly less-cramped apartments. I scoured furniture stores for storage units that had shelves more than 12 inches deep. And I agonized over what to cull when I needed space for less essential items, like clothing or food. Visiting friends would always comment on the sheer bulk of music in my living space, as though they'd stopped by just to gawk at the alphabetically and chronologically organized spectacle.

Today, my music collection resides in a small grey box just a bit larger than the average jewel case—a hard drive that sits on my desk. Thanks to iTunes' number-crunching faculties, I know that this box holds about 17,500 individual pieces of music which, if played start to finish, would last me almost 45 days without repeating a single song. No longer do I have to retrench albums in order to properly file new additions. With a single mouse click, I can organize my collection by song title, artist, album, release year, length, or ability to be turned into a ringtone.

But as much as I've become used to clicking through my library over the past few months, this transformation of music into something post-physical freaks me out. There was value in music having a physical presence—even those records that you'd only pull out for very specific reasons reminded you of their existence during a routine housecleaning. Now it's easy for songs to get lost in the shuffle. The labeling can be faulty; the artist's name could be in a weird nether-region of the library that you never scroll through. The sheer amount of music acquired with just a few clicks can be overwhelming.

In the old days, pruning my record collection was an elaborate process that would start with struggling to squeeze an ill-fitting jewel case into an unyielding rack and end with a trip to the Princeton Record Exchange, where the "what do I get rid of now?" cycle would inevitably start anew thanks to the store's copious bargain racks. Now divesting myself of music has been simplified to a keystroke. As music becomes less physical, its whole essence becomes more disposable. When we change our minds about a song, we just download it again.

As music becomes less physical, its whole essence becomes more disposable. When we change our minds about a song, we just download it again.

The flip side: If anything, computer-based listening has made me more aware of sonics. While I've augmented my laptop's tinny speakers with a fairly decent soundsystem, endless discussions of bitrates and audio clipping make me wonder what I'm missing by not hearing my music through a proper multi-component stereo—or even a boombox.

Sure, I can travel with every piece of music I own on my person, an endeavor that once upon a time would have required forklifts and vans. But I wouldn't dare check a suitcase containing my hard drive, no matter how many layers of sweaters I'd packed around it—its brushed-steel exterior may look tough, but anyone who's owned a computer knows that the components within, which house the precious data, are really quite delicate. Mercurial, even.

Cloud-based solutions, in which a person's music collection exists on a network-accessible computer, are often touted as the next step in music consumption. But I have to wonder: Will the cloud's infinite possibility result in me hearing more music than ever before—even more than now? Or will it result in me just pulling out the same old favorites—and forgetting that there's other music lurking within, waiting to be discovered—simply because I'm not confronted with it when I wander through my collection?

↬ MAURA JOHNSTON IS THE FORMER EDITOR OF MUSIC BLOG *IDOLATOR*.

Paste

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BAND

LOCAL NATIVES ACT GLOBALLY

Photo by Wendy Lynch Redfern

The band now known as Local Natives formed in Orange County, Calif. three years ago. The quintet has since relocated a few dozen miles north to Los Angeles, and its debut LP, *Gorilla Manor* (out in February) is named after the old house they shared in Silver Lake, but they haven't yet built a reputation suited to their name—they keep getting yanked across the pond.

Local Natives' rich, CSNY-spun harmonies, churning folk-guitar lines and ebullient percussion first stirred the overseas press at last year's SXSW conference. This January, the guys found themselves devouring lamb burgers and guzzling hard cider in London during their third European visit in less than a year, still ecstatic about playing for more than 4,000 fans at the Brixton Academy in December, their biggest show to date. Success abroad is sweet, says guitarist and sometime lead singer Taylor Rice, though he admits it's frustrating that he can't pronounce the name of the French TV show—*Ce Soir ou Jamais*, translated as *Tonight or Never*—on which the band just gave yet another characteristically full-bodied performance. "What we need to do in the van," he says, "is listen to Rosetta Stone between every single show and try to learn all of the languages."

The taut song structures of *Gorilla Manor*, arising from self-inflicted jeers and slathered in the colorful muck of a fresh food fight, are the work of bandmates that spend 99 percent of their waking lives together. They'll bond on a stateside tour this spring ("Playing the U.S. is very important to us," Rice notes), but compared to the day-devouring drives which will propel the band around the U.S., the two-hour van rides between European cities are heavenly. "Every musician's dream is to get to tour with your band all over the world," Rice adds. "We're lucky enough that it's happening right now." **REED FISCHER**

LOCAL NATIVES

HOMETOWN: Los Angeles
ALBUM: *Gorilla Manor*
BAND MEMBERS: Kelcey Ayer (vocals, keyboard), Matt Frazier (drums), Ryan Hahn (vocals, guitar), Andy Hamm (bass), Taylor Rice (vocals, guitar)
FOR FANS OF: Andrew Bird, Fleet Foxes, Vampire Weekend

SINGER/SONGWRITER

SALLY SELTMANN HOPELESS NOSTALGIC

In high school, Sally Seltmann received a mixtape of old Marilyn Monroe showtunes from a teacher and instantly fell in love. Intrigued by the crackly recordings, sweeping orchestral arrangements and clichéd lyrics, it was the beginning of a lifelong obsession with what the 34-year-old singer/songwriter now calls "old worldy things." "With something like an antique dress, you imagine it figured in all these romantic scenarios, but really you have no idea what happened in it," Seltmann says from her home in Sydney. "There's a mystery to it."

This fascination continues to influence many of Seltmann's compositions. Her husband, Darren Seltmann of Australian electronica group The Avalanches, has an eclectic vinyl collection—including Doris Day and 1950s Disney soundtracks—and she has sampled from these vintage LPs in a number of her songs. On "I've Got You and You've Got Me," from her 2004 album *The Last Beautiful Day*, she found a fragment from some old, forgotten song in the collection, played it backwards and then looped the reverse sample to form the underlying melody.

While her third album, *Heart That's Pounding* (coming in April), features more actual instruments and less sampling, Seltmann hasn't given up her old-world motif. The video for lead single "Harmony To My Heartbeat" showcases the muted colors and shaky, off-kilter camera angles of an old home movie; the title track is a love song that echoes the dramatic earnestness of old Technicolor musicals as she sings, "Without you for just 10 days, well, I feel like I'm gonna die." A layer of full, simple harmonies reinforces her wide-eyed declarations, a testimony to The Ronettes, she says. (Even "1234," the indelible pop song she co-wrote with Feist, bears the twinges of Seltmann's signature nostalgia, if not her name on the track.)

These songs may sound poppy and carefree on first listen, but each one is tied to dozens of old, untold tales. "If you look closely," Seltmann says, "you'll see a kind of darker layer."

RACHEL DOVEY

SALLY SELTMANN
HOMETOWN: Sydney, Australia
ALBUM: *Heart That's Pounding*
FOR FANS OF: The Cranberries, Feist, Eleni Mandell

Photo by Cybele Malinowski

MAX SILVESTRI **WORLD WIDE WITTY**

Part of comic Max Silvestri's job is to put up with people making fun of him online. "It would be one thing if I was getting emails from people I didn't know that were this take-apart commentary," he says. "But when it's like, 'You look like a big, fat, gay, Mexican Perez Hilton,' I don't even know what that means, but OK, that's hilarious."

Silvestri—like gossip-monger Hilton—owes much of his success to the Internet, but that's where the similarities end. The Brown University graduate hosts a free, live comedy show called Big Terrific in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, every week, and plays scattered dates outside New York from time to time. But the vast majority of his comedic output is found online. From his writings for outlets like *The Onion*'s A.V. Club (about television, food and Internet commenters, amongst other subjects) to his comedy videos (most recently, *Gabe & Max's 100 Seconds*, which Silvestri produces with writing partner and Videogum senior editor Gabe Delahaye, whom he met on MySpace), the web is Silvestri's second home. Via his Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube pages and website, Silvestri tests new material and interacts with fans, without ever having to set foot in a dingy comedy club with a two-drink minimum and aggressive (or worse, uninterested) audiences.

MAX SILVESTRI
HOMETOWN: Brooklyn, N.Y.
WEB SHOW: *Gabe & Max's 100 Seconds* (YouTube.com/details)
FOR FANS OF: *Arrested Development*, Patton Oswalt, Louis C.K.

Not that he's hoping those old-school clubs disappear anytime soon. "I can't imagine they're on the way out," Silvestri says of the establishments that fostered so many of his comic influences. "I hope they're not, if only because a guy like Louis C.K. was not forged in the fires of a lifetime of really attentive audiences. I don't think you'd have someone as good as he is now if it was all playing to your Twitter followers in small clubs. But certainly, hopefully, the times of consistently playing that kind of show are gone."

AUSTIN L. RAY

Photo by Seth Olenick

Photo by Lydia Daniller

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG **CITAY**

Six years ago, Ezra Feinberg moved from Brooklyn to San Francisco's Excelsior District, Jerry Garcia's old neighborhood. Perhaps that explains why, when he began Citay shortly thereafter as a studio project with producer Tim Green (of The Fucking Champs), he began turning out psychedelically ruminative guitar music, often with extended harmonized leads that would've made the Grateful Dead frontman proud.

But use the retro references sparingly—Feinberg can hardly stomach them. "I have no interest in making classic-rock redux—like, zero," the 33-year-old frontman says. "That makes me nauseous. Literally." Still, he gets nerdishly giddy discussing the evolution of the harmonized lead in rock music, from The Byrds to the Allman Brothers to early Metallica and what he calls its "most comfortable home" in various contemporary-metal subgenres.

With an academic's awareness of influence, Feinberg notes that the classic-rock throwback elements of Citay's sound belie a broader set of touchstones, from Journey and Tom Petty to Otis Redding and Stevie Wonder (all of whom pronounce city as "ci-tay," he notes) to Krautrock acts like NEU! and Popol Vuh. "When I started Citay I found myself coming back to some of those classic-rock touchstones in ways that were really personal and different," he says, "kinda cherry-picking what I most strongly related to."

His band released its third album, *Dream Get Together*, in January. While lyrics were "more of an afterthought" on Citay's first two albums (2007's *Little Kingdom* and 2006's self-titled debut), *Dream* contains some "bona-fide choruses" and songwriting in a more traditional pop vein. At just over four minutes, the title track is fairly lean for Citay; it's the "closest thing to a pop song that I've ever written," the frontman admits. Fans of the band's earlier work will notice the move toward concision and narrative. "I feel like," Feinberg says, "I'm opening the door a little wider with each album." **RICHARD PARKS**

CITAY

HOMETOWN: San Francisco
ALBUM: *Dream Get Together*
BAND MEMBERS: Marc Dantona (bass), Ezra Feinberg (vocals, guitar), Tahlia Harbour (vocals, keyboards, glockenspiel), Warren Huefel (drums), Meryl Press (vocals), Josh Pollock (guitar), Sean Smith (guitar)
FOR FANS OF: Pink Floyd, NEU!, The Allman Brothers Band

THE CLIENTELE BONFIRES ON THE HEATH

"A band out of time, The Clientele conjures the ghosts of chirpy British pop and the mellow, sepia-toned rock of the mid-1960s. Yet, while there are clearly trace elements of Donovan and The Zombies, the band's debt to the past is more about feeling and mood than note-for-note re-creations." —NPR's Song of the Day

SPOON TRANSFERENCE

"*Transference* is the most exciting album Spoon has ever made" —Nylon Guys

STROKE SONGS FOR CHRIS KNOX

Featuring covers by Jeff Mangum, Jay Reatard, and Yo La Tengo, all proceeds from this benefit go toward the recovery of New Zealand legend Chris Knox.

SHOUT OUT LOUDS WORK

Produced by Phil Ek (Fleet Foxes, Band of Horses, The Shins), *Work* strips away all of the bells and whistles of previous efforts to showcase the band doing what they do best, writing and playing pop music that is "nostalgic and angst-ridden, but ultimately life-affirming."—Amazon.com

MERGE RECORDS

SINGER/SONGWRITER

NNEKA
AN EDUCATION

In 2000, like so many other teenagers before her, 19-year-old Nneka Egbuna left the home she'd always known to find her place in the world. But she didn't pack up Mom and Dad's minivan with hopeful visions of roommates and frat parties. Instead, she left her father and mothers (polygamy is common in her home country of Nigeria) for Germany, where she attended college and got to know her biological mother. What followed was a string of learning experiences—practical, emotional and formal—and a growing need to articulate what they stirred within her.

"A year after I arrived in Germany, I wrote a lot in a kind of diary and eventually, I started singing my diary," Egbuna says today. "I used to always sing when I was young, but I never realized I had so much passion for music until I knew I was by myself and I needed something to hold onto."

Journal entries became songs and songs became her 2006 debut, *Victim of Truth*, which caught the ear of European critics and earned her fans like Lenny Kravitz and Lauryn Hill. Despite her burgeoning career, Egbuna refused to neglect her studies at Hamburg University, graduating in 2008 with an anthropology degree. The balancing act was stressful, she says, but provided even more songwriting fodder. After years spent with academics "searching for reasons and the reasons for reasons," she's concluded that books alone can't provide all the answers: "At the end of the day," she says, "the solution to every problem, every negativity, is love."

NNEKA
HOMETOWN: Warri, Nigeria
ALBUM: *Concrete Jungle*
FOR FANS OF: Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu, Santigold

On her U.S. debut, *Concrete Jungle* (out in February) this faith in love ties together R&B-infused tracks about prejudice and corruption, songs crafted with conviction, pride and an awareness of herself and the intricacies of the world. Egbuna is adamant that music is her passion, not her career, and her plan for the near future is both lofty and simple: "I'm looking forward to being healthy and inspiring the world," she says, "and being inspired by the world." **ANITRA K. VRABEL**

Photo by Jens Bolt

CHLOE MORETZ
CONNECTS THE DOTS

This spring, a purple-haired Chloe Moretz will flip, somersault and knife-fight her way across the big screen as Hit-Girl in Matthew Vaughn's *Kick-Ass*. But the 13-year-old actress's acrobatics (for which she attended almost a month of circus school in Toronto and lessons with one of Jackie Chan's trainers) are no match for the tiny vigilante's vocabulary. In one scene, Moretz' character asks her on-screen father, played by Nicholas Cage, "Can I get a puppy? A cuddly fluffy one." He falls silent, incredulous, until she spurts, "I'm just fucking with you, Daddy. I'd like a Benchmade model 42 butterfly knife."

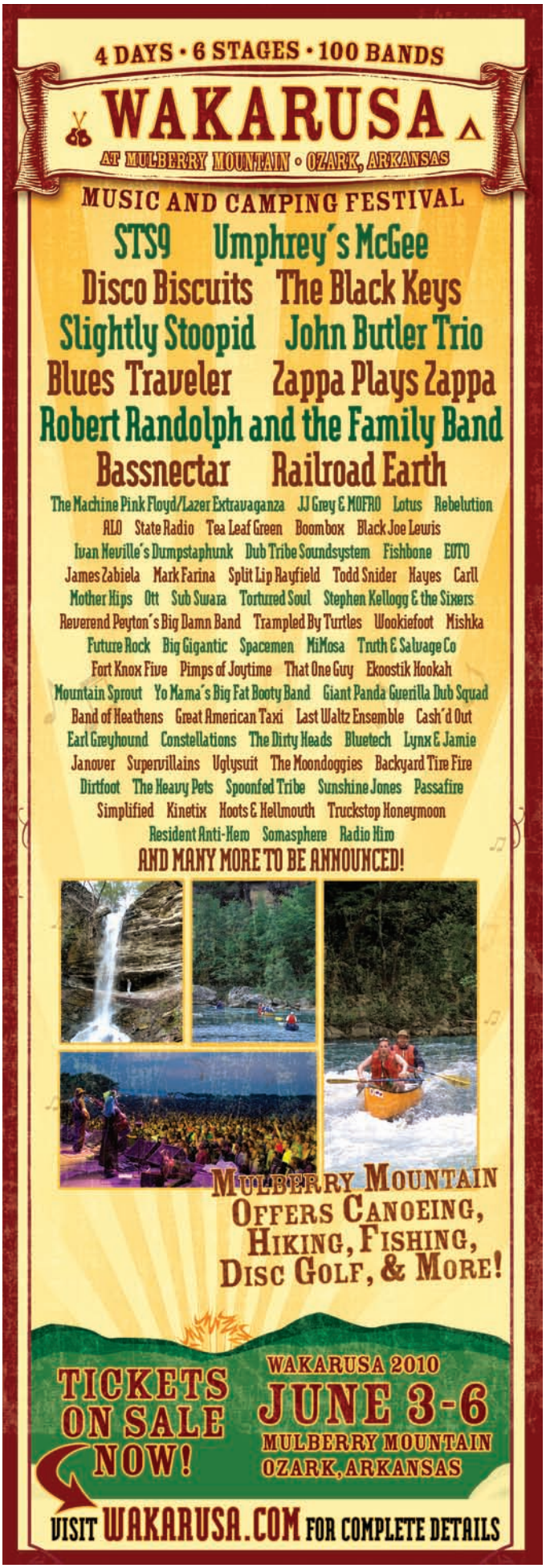
CHLOE MORETZ
HOMETOWN: Atlanta
MOVIE: *Kick-Ass*
FOR FANS OF: Drew Barrymore, Jodie Foster, Natalie Portman

Hit-Girl may have an R-rated, carnage-driven persona, but Moretz has a history of bringing to life characters that would be difficult for an adult, much less a tween. She gave compelling dating advice to Joseph Gordon-Levitt's character in *(500) Days of Summer,* channeled a spiteful child-ghost in *The Amityville Horror* and played a nine-year-old suffering from a brain tumor in *The Eye*. Her deadpan comedic timing and restrained earnestness carry her beyond the realm of baby stars aping grown-ups for effect; the girl can really *act*.

Her secret, she says, is connecting the dots between herself and her characters. "Even though Hit-Girl is this crazy vigilante, she's also a 12-year-old," Moretz explains. "She loves purple, she loves wearing costumes. She doesn't know any better. I connected to her by realizing she's just a kid, like me."

Still, Moretz insists that, off-screen, she can't access Hit-Girl whenever she'd like. "I'm stronger and a little more physically fit from the role," she says, "but if I was in a restaurant that got robbed, I would scream and cry and call 911." **RACHEL DOVEY**

Photo courtesy of Marv Films/Lionsgate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visionaries

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He's been wearing the squared-off round-lens pair for decades. Are they so retro they're back in style?

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The lanky auteur occasionally sports a pair with clear-plastic frames.

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The Chinese director reportedly never removes his dark glasses, which may explain his penchant for hyper-intense colors.

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TINA FEY

Despite rumors, the *Mean Girls* screenwriter and reigning queen of geek-chic does, in fact, need glasses to read the cue cards.

267 SHELL GAME
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[THE FIFTY]

BEST

LIVING

DIRECTORS

FEW ARTISTIC ENDEAVORS ARE MORE COLLABORATIVE THAN FILMMAKING. FROM MARQUEE ACTORS, SCREENWRITERS AND CINEMATOGRAPHERS TO THE UNDERAPPRECIATED GRIPS, EDITORS AND EXTRAS, IT CAN TAKE A CAST OF HUNDREDS OR THOUSANDS TO BRING A STORY TO THE BIG SCREEN. BUT AN INDIVIDUAL MAN OR WOMAN (OR OCCASIONALLY A PAIR OF SIBLINGS) MUST COORDINATE THOSE PLAYERS, ORCHESTRATING THE CINEMATIC SYMPHONY. THIS MONTH, WE CELEBRATE 50 OF OUR GREATEST LIVING DIRECTORS, ALL OF WHOM HAVE REDEFINED THE ART OF MOTION PICTURES.

—JOSH JACKSON

50 MEL BROOKS

BORN: 1926, Brooklyn, N.Y.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Blazing Saddles* (1974)

The way Mel Brooks worships comedy is contagious, even when the fever is slow to catch on. Brooks' 1968 movie, *The Producers*, which starred Gene Wilder in his first comedic role, was so audacious in its depiction of a frolicking Führer singing "Springtime for Hitler" that it was virtually boycotted by the public until it won an Academy Award. Brooks is a true comedic auteur: The public didn't tell him what was funny—he told them. And he was right. He was a Jew who fought in World War II, saw firsthand the atrocities mankind wreaked on his heritage, and came out understanding that laughter is the most powerful weapon and remedy. Later, with Buck Henry, he created TV spy spoof *Get Smart*. Few remember how much this series did to target and annihilate the stifling fear people still harbored due to the Cold War.

Brooks' *Blazing Saddles* and *Young Frankenstein* (both released in 1974) are two of the greatest comedies ever made. More than just simple send-ups of the Western and horror genres, they used the most unlikely settings to skewer modern racial sensitivities. Nobody knew better than Brooks the necessity of attacking subjects of common public offense. That's why his comedies are still so therapeutic: His is a world where it's impossible to take yourself, or anything else, too seriously. **HOLLIS GILLESPIE**

49 CHARLES BURNETT

BORN: 1944, Vicksburg, Miss.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Killer of Sheep* (1977)

It's crazy that we've seen so few major films from Charles Burnett. The MacArthur Fellow has toiled quietly in TV for many years (he was one of several directors who worked on Martin Scorsese's 2003 PBS series *The Blues*), and has abided as a definitive voice expressing the roots and lore of African-American culture. *Killer of Sheep*—the 16mm, black-and-white feature he wrapped in 1977 on a $10,000 budget while a graduate student at UCLA—didn't see proper release until 2007. Then, finally, these unflinching (yet lovely) scenes from the hard-knock life of a working-class black family living in Watts, Ga.—set to a soundtrack lambent of midnight jazz and deep blues—were greeted with a rhapsodic tide of rediscovery. Critics compared Burnett to Rossellini and De Sica, Cassavetes and Robert Frank, calling him an American neo-realist visionary. His 1990 film *To Sleep with Anger*, starring Danny Glover as a character who can only be called "the blues walking like a man," proved Burnett to be a magical realist, too, evoking Mississippi-crossroads myths and black snakes moaning. Burnett's compassionate social conscience seems out of joint with 21st-century pop culture, but his profound, graceful understanding of human nature endears our hearts to the flickering screen. **STEVE DOLLAR**

↬ Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line*

48 ERROL MORRIS

BORN: 1948, Long Island, N.Y.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* (2003)

Errol Morris' unique approach to documentary filmmaking diverges from the cinema-verité in vogue while he was in school. Instead of verité's on-the-spot shooting, Morris shoots with the precision of Hitchcock. And instead of attempting to show what's happening as it happens, he pieces his films together retrospectively. But above all, instead of declaring that truth can be captured with a camera, Morris recognizes the limits of his form and uses them to his advantage. In his search to find a truth beyond images, Morris trashed the genre's rulebook. Documentary cinema has never been the same. **SEAN GANDERT**

47 JIM SHERIDAN

BORN: 1949, Dublin, Ireland
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *My Left Foot: The Story of Christy Brown* (1989)

Jim Sheridan has shown that honest, unflinching portrayals of families can succeed both critically and commercially. His first feature, 1989's *My Left Foot: The Story of Christy Brown*, garnered five Oscar nominations—including Best Picture and Best Director—and earned actor Daniel Day-Lewis his first statue. Sheridan continued to lean on his Irish roots with *In the Name of the Father*, *The Boxer* and the semi-autobiographical *In America* before tackling last year's vivid Iraq War homecoming story, *Brothers*. The powerful, driving force behind each of his films is family. **TIM BASHAM**

46 JOHN SAYLES

BORN: 1950, Schenectady, N.Y.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Lone Star* (1996)

John Sayles epitomizes the idea of an independent filmmaker: a writer/director of singular vision, making intimate movies on shoestring budgets financed outside of the studio system. But he's also used that very system to his great advantage. He's financed many of the 16 films he's written and

directed by working for others—cranking out B-movie scripts for Roger Corman, directing Bruce Springsteen videos like "Born in the USA," rewriting blockbusters like *Apollo 13* and *The Fugitive*, even taking a commission from Steven Spielberg to write *Jurassic Park IV*. But his brilliance lies in his examinations of personal relationships and his astute, nuanced observations of everyday politics. He also elicits fantastic performances from casts that include David Strathairn, Chris Cooper, Mary McDonnell, Kris Kristofferson, Angela Bassett and many other greats. Highlights include *Return of the Secaucus 7*, *Passion Fish*, and *The Secret of Roan Inish*. **TIM REGAN-PORTER**

45 SOFIA COPPOLA

BORN: 1971, New York
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Lost in Translation* (2003)

With just three full-length movies in 10 years, Sofia Coppola has not only squelched any accusation of nepotism (she's the daughter of Francis Ford and the cousin to all of Hollywood), she's established a small, beautiful oeuvre. Each film varies just enough in setting and subject: *The Virgin Suicides* captures the breathlessness of adolescence in 1970s suburbia, while *Lost in Translation* and *Marie Antoinette* address the perils of young womanhood—namely, that of a newly married photographer in present-day Japan and the queen of France in the 1700s.

Coppola approaches her stories with enough imagination and empathy to make Bill Murray a sex symbol and the woman who said "Let them eat cake" seem sympathetic. While *Marie Antoinette* was as frothily ornate as one of Kirsten Dunst's frilly dresses, Coppola is generally a restrained stylist and assured storyteller, threading her tragedies with compelling ambiguities.

Perhaps what most distinguishes Coppola is her complex conflation of soundtrack and dialogue, which allows music to express the emotions her characters cannot bring themselves to divulge—think of the neighborhood boys playing "So Far Away" over the phone to the Lisbon sisters, or of Murray and Scarlett Johansson flirtatiously disclosing their deepest desires via karaoke. Coppola re-imagines the ways pop culture can function onscreen, making her modest catalog far more compelling than many directors' more expansive canons. **STEPHEN M. DEUSNER**

Avatar photo courtesy of 20th Century Fox

44 CAMERON CROWE

BORN: 1957, Palm Springs, Calif.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Almost Famous* (2000)

Cameron Crowe was only the second director to grace the cover of *Paste*. (Wes Anderson was first.) As Crowe prepared to release 2005's *Elizabethtown*, we asked him to discuss each of his previous films:

***SAY ANYTHING* (1989, WRITER/DIRECTOR)**
"My favorite film. It's because of Lloyd. And I love the collaboration that happened with John Cusack, where he brought anger and resentment and pain to the character of an optimist, and in that it was something really timeless, and every time I watch it I feel like it's lightning in a bottle and in that character."

***SINGLES* (1992, WRITER/DIRECTOR/CO-PRODUCER)**
"I guess I was always a little sad that the movie was on the shelf at Warner Brothers until grunge exploded and they had a reason to release it. And in some quarters, at the time, it was felt that somebody had gone out and immediately made a movie to capitalize on the grunge scene, when in fact it was a labor of love, to kind of help spotlight a lot of the local bands I really loved. And it was sort my version of Woody Allen's *Manhattan*."

***JERRY MAGUIRE* (1996, WRITER/DIRECTOR/CO-PRODUCER)**
"*Jerry Maguire* took a long time to write, and the gift of working that long on a script was that the cast was perfect. Everybody was perfectly cast and dying to come to work every day. I knew that when we saw the rough assembly that it worked, and I wanted to do this for life—that I wanted to be a director for life, that it was a craft that you could actually get better at and learn on the job and do."

***ALMOST FAMOUS* (2000, WRITER/DIRECTOR/CO-PRODUCER)**
"*Almost Famous* was the movie I always had in my back pocket, that I knew, one day, if everything worked out, I'd be able to make, and it would be a love letter to rock. And I was lucky enough—because of the success of *Jerry Maguire*—to make it."

***VANILLA SKY* (2001, WRITER/DIRECTOR/CO-PRODUCER)**
"*Vanilla Sky* felt like a real kind of palate cleanser of a movie to have done. We were trying to beat an actors' strike. We made the movie like the way people talk about having made their punk-rock albums: 'Bash it out! Do it! The truth will come from that process.' So I'd done that, but it didn't feel totally like me or the version of the writing that I know I can do when I have time to kind of marinate with it and really get my heart into it all the way. I was not prepared for how polarizing it would be, but I think you can't keep making the same movie, nor should you, and that ended up being as personal, I think, in its own way, as many of the other things that I've done."

Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*

42 JANE CAMPION

BORN: 1954, Wellington, New Zealand
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *The Piano* (1993)

The anxious, sometimes ominous sexuality in Jane Campion's films is unmistakable. Beneath her movies' lyrical, understated surfaces—she thrives in period settings—is a fierce longing for erotic intimacy and release. It's intense enough that her undisputed masterpiece, *The Piano*, ultimately explodes into one of the most horrific scenes of cinema violence imaginable. Be it misunderstood psychosexual thriller *In the Cut* or last year's gaspingly romantic, PG-rated drama *Bright Star*, Campion explores the terrains of desire, sexual possibility and mortality with an undiluted passion. **JEFFREY BLOOMER**

43 TERRENCE MALICK

BORN: 1943, Ottawa, Ill.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Days of Heaven* (1978)

Terrence Malick's latest film, *The Tree of Life*, is currently in post-production—merely five years after his sumptuous, breathtaking *The New World*. That's cause for fans to rejoice, as decades have often passed between transmissions from his secluded world. Ever since his ruminative 1973 debut *Badlands*, Malick has been out of step with the modern age, his gaze slowly taking in the surrounding world. The tremendous agricultural drama *Days of Heaven* regards animals as well as actors, while war story *The Thin Red Line* melds voices so as to suggest a greater underlying humanity. **ANDY BETA**

41 JAMES CAMERON

BORN: 1954, Kapuskasing, Canada
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Avatar* (2009)

In U.S. cinema, "big-budget blockbuster" is euphemistic shorthand for "pandering to the lowest common denominator." But while James Cameron's personality

James Cameron's *Avatar*

and production costs are best described as "outsized," few can match his visionary talent for creating whole cinematic worlds that achieve both commercial and critical success. *Aliens*, the first two *Terminator* movies, *Titanic* and *Avatar* are all modern epics in their own right—films that offer engrossing plots and affecting characters wrapped in layers of technical wizardry. Cameron's movies are that ultimate rarity in modern filmmaking: moviegoing experiences in which suspension of disbelief doesn't even factor. **MICHAEL SABA**

40 GUILLERMO DEL TORO

BORN: 1964, Guadalajara, Mexico
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006)

An overgrown kid with a sprawling imagination, Guillermo Del Toro makes movies the way we would, if we could remember what it was like to be seven years old, under the covers with a flashlight and a comic book (or a collection of Edgar Allan Poe or H.P. Lovecraft)—alone in the dark, with all those noises coming from the bushes outside the window. A filmmaker who brings poetic eloquence to his fascination with "insects, clockwork, monsters, dark places and unborn things," Del Toro has a marrow-deep understanding of the primal scenery that animates our most essential dreads and longings (and he knows those often amount to the same thing). As he's frequently said, it's the monster he loves, and this love gives his putative horror films their humanity. During the the last decade, Del Toro was at the detonator—alongside colleagues Alfonso Cuarón (*Children of Men*) and Alejandro González Iñárritu (*Amores Perros*)—as Mexico blew up on the cinematic radar. Like his countrymen, he's made small, cherished art-house films (*The Devil's Backbone*, *Pan's Labyrinth*) and graduated to the über-budget franchise epics. But even the pulpy vigor of the *Hellboy* series fails to obscure this fevered demonologist as he composes a fabulist fugue most of us only get to see in our sleep. **SD**

Guillermo Del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*

39 JACQUES RIVETTE

BORN: 1928, Seine Maritame, France
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *La belle noiseuse* (1991)

As much a magician as an auteur, Jacques Rivette approaches narrative cinema as something that can appear and disappear, as if a rabbit from the top hat Juliet Berto dons in *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (the 1974 identity-swap fantasia that may be his most popular film). As the landlord of what critic Jonathan Rosenbaum called the "House of Fiction," Rivette ushers his audience into parallel realities of improvisational fancy, conspiracy, process, arcane literary allusions, whole generations of beautiful French actresses, extended duration (his mysterious *Out 1*, shown only once, is said to have run 743 minutes), mad love, theatrical doubling and evanescence. An able old master of *le nouvelle vague*, Rivette is still busy making movies as he begins his 82rd year. **SD**

38 SPIKE LEE

Born: 1957, Atlanta, Ga.
Crowning Achievement: *Do the Right Thing* (1989)

No one captures a burnt-lens Brooklyn sunset (*Do The Right Thing*) or sculpts ornery heroes unafraid to shout about Hurricane Katrina (*When the Levees Broke*), cry when mama dies (*Crooklyn*) or take solace in sex and saxophones (*Mo' Better Blues*) the way Spike Lee does. Thanks to him, we have one of Stevie Wonder's best songs ("These Three Words," from *Jungle Fever*) and a definition of blackristocracy. When Lee sets his crazy characters adrift on camera dollies in wide-angle shots down city sidewalks, we float right along with them. **KRISTI YORK WOOTEN**

37 PEDRO ALMODÓVAR

BORN: 1949, Ciudad Real, Spain
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Talk to Her* (2002)

Pedro Almodóvar communicates his unique visions with unparalleled precision. The stories he tells often capture life's dark, tragic moments, but he paints each film with such complex humanity that light almost always shines through. Almodóvar doesn't pass judgment on his characters, attempting only to understand them and their choices, making each sympathetic and relatable.

Inspired by strong, passionate female characters, his films encompass everything true and powerful in filmmaking. Known for dedicating time to each department, his directorial choices are clear in the vivid production design, fluid cinematography and bold editing. The loyalty he inspires in those around him—from cast to crew—is a testament to his leadership.

Despite his films' commercial success, each grew from an independent heart inspired by far more than box-office numbers. Almodóvar understands the power of words and knows that the reaction to an event can be stronger than the event itself. He's a writer/director/producer who's not afraid to follow the path his characters take him down—wherever it may lead. His only regard is for the story and creating a world in which to tell it. **ERICA DUNTON**

Erica Dunton is the director of RedMeansGo, Find Love *and* The 27 Club.

36 RICHARD LINKLATER

BORN: 1960, Houston
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Before Sunset* (2004)

In Richard Linklater's feature-length dreamscape *Waking Life*, a character named Boat Car Guy declares, "The idea is to remain in a state of constant departure, while always arriving." In anyone else's parlance it would be a glib paradox, but for this writer/director it's a delirious mission statement—open incentive for his characters to charge ahead even if it's not clear where they're going.

Linklater, who turns 50 this year, is in the company of directors like Steven Soderbergh in that his movies often feel connected only by his name being at the top of the credits. Over the years, he's directed a bank-robber flick, a rotoscoped sci-fi epic and a mass-appeal Jack Black comedy. And yet his films all share the trademark Linklater preoccupation—a hungry, at times breathless, drive for conversation.

From his shaggy early features like *Slacker* and *Dazed and Confused* to more elegant recent work like *Me and Orson Welles*, Linklater's camera often idylls after characters rapt in some digressive encounter. His 2001 thriller *Tape* gleans its suspense solely from a long, increasingly ominous exchange between three people in a motel room. Though he first came to attention as a scrappy disciple of the inventive Austin film scene, Linklater's old-fashioned insistence on dialogue for its own dramatic sake has made him an essential filmmaker. **JB**

35 RIDLEY SCOTT

BORN: 1937, South Shields, England
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Blade Runner* (1982)

Ridley Scott's chops are as vast as his trademark shots of impossibly detailed cityscapes, and every bit as compelling. He began his career as a TV director for the BBC and quickly matured into a filmmaker whose love for his craft is writ onscreen both small and large. He's tackled Napoleonic period drama in *The Duellists* and ancient Rome in *Gladiator*, and he launched a sci-fi-moviemaking renaissance with *Alien* and *Blade Runner*. Scott weaves together threads of exposition, a seeming paradox that produces vivid and eminently watchable cinematic tapestries. **MS**

34 GUS VAN SANT

BORN: 1952, Louisville, Ky.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Good Will Hunting* (1997)

Gus Van Sant allows us to be flies on the wall without the stain of voyeurism—and regardless of his subject matter, his films echo the realness of life. Whether the protagonist is a gay politician, a semi-automatic-rifle-wielding adolescent, or a reclusive author mentoring a kid who

➥ Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

loves to write, Van Sant makes you feel like their moments are your own. Having had the honor of working with Van Sant on my first film, I see why his work is so easy to relate to. Even though I was only 16 and it was my first acting gig, he allowed me to find my way. At times he had to take the crayon away from the kid, but he didn't mind if I colored outside the lines every now and then. That type of freedom helped me explore and find what felt most natural. But most importantly, beyond his talents as a filmmaker, he's a wonderful human being.

ROB BROWN

Rob Brown starred as Jamal Wallace in Van Sant's Finding Forrester *and will star in David Simon's upcoming HBO series* Treme.

33 ALAIN RESNAIS

BORN: 1922, Vannes, France
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959)

Though many have tried, no one has ever made anything quite like *Last Year at Marienbad*, Alain Renais's sublime and elegant puzzlement. This bizarre love triangle set in the twilight zone of a European resort became a high-art brainteaser back when glittering doses of *la dolce vita* and Old-World ennui were cinematic exotica for American moviegoers. Even now, much of its purgatorial chic lingers in the uncanny limbo of David Lynch's films, in those silly commercials for Calvin Klein's Obsession and in the twisty mindbending of temporal *huh?*-fest *Lost*. Part of the Left Bank school of filmmakers that paralleled the French New Wave of Godard and Truffaut in the 1950s, Resnais has never coasted on his art-house pedigree (which includes textbook classics *Night and Fog* and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*). At 87, he has slipped into a freewheeling style that combines the insight of age with the verve of someone 60 years younger. His forthcoming *Wild Grass*, starring wife Sabine Azéma and Gallic heartthrob Matheiu Amalric, seems less like the swan song implied in its theme (midlife crisis with a side of brie) than a crafty exercise in sly wit. **SD**

➥ Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*

32 MICHAEL HANEKE

BORN: 1942, Munich, Germany
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Caché (Hidden)* (2005)

Michael Haneke can be vicious. His most notorious movie, *Funny Games*, is one long torture session, and he shot it twice—once in Austria and again in America. Depicting a sadomasochistic relationship between musicians, *The Piano Teacher* doesn't flinch when it delivers the brutal rape of its main character. Superficially, Haneke comes across as a practitioner of shock who satirizes cinema's stylized depiction of violence and cruelty by bringing it boldly to the forefront. As you recoil, he asks, "Isn't this what you wanted?" In that regard, he can be didactic and blunt, but his best movies finesse the viewer into discomfort, introducing a central mystery that not only remains unsolved, but calls into question the very principles of filmmaking. *Caché*, perhaps his most unsettling work, pits its upper-middle-class Parisian characters—each tracing a uniquely desperate trajectory of paranoid breakdown—against an audience surveilling them by proxy and a director who won't let anyone off easily: not them, not you, not even himself. **SMD**

31 CHRIS MARKER

BORN: 1921, Neuilly-sur Seine, France
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Sans Soleil (Without Sun)* (1983)

Early on in Chris Marker's epochal 1983 documentary/travelogue/meditation *Sans Soleil*, the unnamed narrator says, "I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember; we rewrite memory much as history is re-written." For over half a century, the mysterious Marker—who's never been photo-

graphed—has mused on the cognitive and amnesiac qualities of the human mind, and society at large. His earliest films documented Peking, Cuba, Paris, even Washington D.C. amid political upheaval, while his groundbreaking 1962 short *La Jetée* poetically blended circular time, static frames and the persistence of—what else?—memory, to devastating effect. That the bulk of his work remains out of print gives Marker an intangibility befitting one of his favorite images, that of the disappearing Cheshire cat. **AB**

30 DANNY BOYLE

BORN: 1956, Radcliffe, England
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)

Eight films and 16 years into his career, Danny Boyle has one of the most varied filmographies of any director on our list: the dark thriller *Shallow Grave*, the stylish druggie movie *Trainspotting*, the post-apocalyptic zombie favorite *28 Days Later*, the feel-good family film *Millions*, the ambitious sci-fi of *Sunshine* and the surprise hit *Slumdog Millionaire*. Even more remarkable, only two of his films—the romantic comedy *A Life Less Ordinary* and the mishmash of *The Beach*—disappoint. No matter the genre, story or visual style, the director conveys an enthusiasm for his characters, and for moviemaking itself. Boyle is a true master of the language of film, full of surprise and delight. **TRP**

➥ Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*

29 CHRISTOPHER NOLAN

BORN: 1970, London
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *The Dark Knight* (2008)

Nothing spells success like the rescue of a franchise, and after spinning gold with *Batman Begins*, Christopher Nolan out-blockbustered himself with sequel *The Dark Knight*. But it's his ability to make a dramatic moment both epic and intimate that sets him apart, along with his mastery of plot turns that leave his audience in a constant state of expectation—particularly in his mind-blowing breakthrough, *Memento*. Films like 2006's *The Prestige* twist with ease, yet never seem too caught up in their own cleverness. And his dabbling with the supernatural is about to be writ large with this summer's *Inception*. **TIM BASHAM**

28 CLAIRE DENIS

BORN: 1948, Paris
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Chocolat* (1988)

"My films, sadly enough, are sometimes unbalanced," Claire Denis told me back in 2004. "They have a limp or one arm shorter or a big nose, but even in the editing room when we try to change that, normally it doesn't work." I nearly choked on my tea. Denis' films are as graceful as they come: bold and musical, warm and intelligent, they're so subtle they often seem to work on a subconscious level. Revisiting her movies invariably turns up something new, something placed carefully in the flow of the story by a sure hand, something that went previously unseen. A big nose? A limp? More like Fred Astaire.

Denis' hallmark is an elliptical storytelling style requiring an active audience, and her films, though not quite puzzles, are full of gaps and undercurrents; she trusts the audience to put everything together. Such maturity makes sense from someone who made her first film at the age of 40, and only then after she'd worked as an assistant director for such legendary filmmakers as Jacques Rivette, Wim Wenders and Jim Jarmusch. Denis co-writes all of all her pictures, and draws inspiration from a wide variety of resources, including Melville and Faulkner and her own experiences growing up in Africa and France. She combines all this in films that are both cohesive and cinematic. Where a novelist might spend a paragraph describing a character's thoughts, Denis will convey something similar in a fleeting shot. **ROBERT DAVIS**

27 TERRY GILLIAM

Born: 1940, Minneapolis, Minn.
Crowning Achievement: *Brazil* (1985)

When children recall their favorite movies, songs and bedtime stories, they usually focus on the strangest things: the color of the butterfly's wings, the old witch's funny hat or the giant machine that (for some reason) has a hamster wheel tucked into its guts.

Terry Gilliam's storytelling speaks to that little kid within all of us. From his early work with Monty Python (the only American of the sextet) came some truly brilliant animation, but not until the 1980s with *Brazil*, *Time Bandits*, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*) and '90s (*The Fisher King*, *12 Monkeys*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* did Gilliam emerge as one of the most unique, unpredictable, and plain-old-fascinating filmmakers alive. In the '00s he gave us wildly varied experiments like *Tideland*, *The Brothers Grimm* and *The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus*. Even his lesser films are loaded with more ideas in one scene than most movies attempt in two hours. Gilliam is equally brilliant and demented, passionate and eccentric, child-like and cynical. He's still the master of the odd little detail. **SCOTT WEINBERG**

26 JIM JARMUSCH

BORN: 1953, Akron, Ohio
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999)

Jim Jarmusch makes action movies without action, Westerns without heroes and dramas without resolution. Influenced by the French and Japanese exports he saw in his youth, his gift to cinema has been a foreign perspective of his own country, as he's lit the wick of a slow-burning ambiguity that echoes through his introverted characters and decompressed plots. Along with the work of Spike Lee, Gus Van Sant and John Sayles, Jarmusch helped redefine independent film in America. He began filming at New York University, where he made *Permanent Vacation* with with money from a fellowship grant; the feat exiled him from college but propelled him to craft engulfing visual poems about outsiders roadtripping through a lonely, awkward America. Later, he fused his singular vision with Eastern philosophy in *Ghost Dog* and *The Limits of Control*. Whether he's channeling the French New Wave, punk No Wave or arranging an impromptu meeting between Bill Murray and RZA, Jarmusch has continually taught Hollywood that spontaneity and a lingering camera are the best special effects money can't buy. **SE**

25 WIM WENDERS

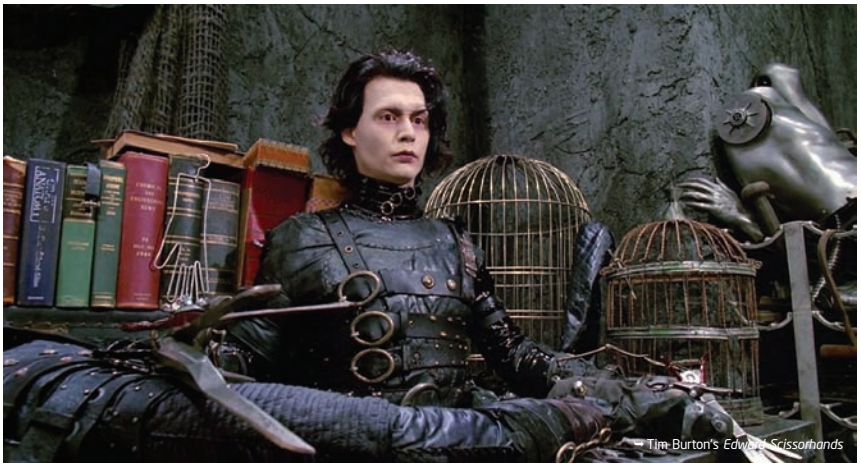
BORN: 1945, Düsseldorf, Germany
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Wings of Desire* (1987)

Before his fascination with movies—especially American B-movies—led him to direct, Wim Wenders studied medicine and philosophy, then dropped out of school to try painting. Perhaps this varied background accounts for the ambition and distinctiveness of this auteur, who can take a four-continent road trip (*Until the End of the World*), tell of a supernatural love affair via mundane details and philosophical musings (*Wings of Desire*), or document the Cuban music scene (*Buena Vista Social Club*) and mark them all with his unmistakable fingerprint. They are all pieces of a whole, united by Wenders' love of music (Bono, Nick Cave, Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno have lent their talents to his films), concern for love and lost souls, uniquely philosophical and tactile lens on the world, and a visual style and sense of pacing that mixes French New Wave, American melodrama, a dash of Noir and a good-sized dose of Bergmanesque heft and silence. Wenders can be difficult—his films often reveal themselves in the spaces between the conceits of action, drama and dialogue—and he sometimes falls flat (*The Million Dollar Hotel*). But when he gets it right (see *Wings of Desire* and *Paris, Texas*), he delivers a masterpiece that reveals his true genius. **TRP**

24 TIM BURTON

BORN: 1958, Burbank, Calif.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Edward Scissorhands* (1990)

Tim Burton reigns as the wiry-haired, eccentric professor of film, routinely concocting such fantastic, gothic playgrounds as the underworld in 1988's *Beetlejuice* and Gotham City in 1989's *Batman*. These locales may seem like pure popcorn escapism, but they stem from Burton's childhood dreams of escaping the trappings of his staid, suburban upbringing in Burbank. His outcast status as an awkward kid more comfortable drawing than socializing has fueled his excellence at bringing misfits to light in all their marvelous glory. Even the famous title character of his latest film, *Alice in Wonderland*, with her restless adherence to restrictive English mores, fits easily among his cadre of fringe protagonists alongside Pee-wee Herman, Willy Wonka and Sweeney Todd. But Burton's most enduring exploration of freakdom remains 1990's *Edward Scissorhands*. The cinematic manifestation of his childhood isolation, it's a condemnation of polite society's dark underbelly, an emphatic case for Burton's conviction that uniqueness be not just accepted, but celebrated. **CORY ALBERTSON**


Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*

➥ David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence*

23 DAVID CRONENBERG

BORN: 1943, Toronto
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT:
A History of Violence (2005)

David Cronenberg doesn't have a squeamish bone in his body. The Canadian filmmaker spent much of his career making films that defined "body horror," a genre that preys on the fear of infection. And from *Shivers* (1975) to *Dead Ringers* (1988) to adaptations of "unfilmable" books like *Naked Lunch* (1991), Cronenberg's work plays with the link between the psychological and physical. Recently, he's turned toward broader accessibility, resulting in his two best films yet: *A History of Violence* (2005) depicts an enigmatic fugitive with a dark past, and *Eastern Promises* (2007) is equal parts thriller and mafia fable. For someone who directed his first feature in 1969, it feels like Cronenberg is just getting started. **ALISSA WILKINSON**

22 AGNÈS VARDA

BORN: 1928, Brussels, Belgium
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Vagabond* (1985)

We should all be so lucky to live as long and productively as 81-year-old Agnès Varda. And if we do, let's hope to greet the winter with the sheer (pardon my French) *joie de vivre* that illuminates every frame of *The Beaches of Agnès*, a perfect composite of everything that qualifies her as one of the most vital filmmakers going. This 2009 autobiographical spree travels back and forth through time and memory, common themes explored by Varda and her 1950s Left Bank cohorts Alain Resnais and Chris Marker (who appears in the film as a cartoon cat). Images and reflections shuffle like postcards as the scenery circles back to the seasoned photographer's leap into film: 1956's *La Pointe-courte*, the intimate story of a collapsing marriage in a Mediterranean village, which Varda says she made having seen almost no movies other than *Citizen Kane*. Subsequent efforts, toggling between fact and fiction, saw Varda evolve as the resonant female voice in the New Wave boy's club, from *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962) to *Vagabond* (1985), which made a star of teenaged Sandrine Bonnaire. Varda's consuming interest in film as a medium for artistic and sensory inquiry, rather than a mode of entertainment, is a quintessentially French trait. It is also, for this lover and maker of images that live beyond their frame, a trusty bohemian credo. "You had a remarkable career in an age when women didn't have careers," offered an interviewer in a recent issue of *The Believer*. "I had a *world*," Varda replied. "I don't think I had a career. I made films." **SD**

21 APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL

BORN: 1970, Bangkok, Thailand
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT:
Syndromes and a Century (2006)

Southeast Asian cinema, often inhibited by zealous censors and corrupt government film boards, has long been marginalized even within the Asian market, which is dominated by Japan and South Korea. But up to bat comes Apichatpong Weerasethakul (you can call him Joe) whose films not only absorb and reflect on Thailand's cultural and spiritual idenity, but do so in bold, strange and elliptical ways. He's been dubbed a "Buddhist David Lynch," but that seems too reductive for a 39-year-old original whose films leap from the inscrutably sublime (*Syndromes and a Century*) to the giddily ridiculous (*The Adventures of Iron Pussy*). **SD**

20 HAYAO MIYAZAKI

BORN: 1941, Tokyo, Japan
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Princess Mononoke* (1997)

Ever dream in Japanese? If you've seen the animated works of Hayao Miyazaki, the answer is likely yes. His movies rise from subconscious pools, burst from

➥ Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Syndromes of A Century*

↪ David Fincher's *Fight Club*

Jungian jungles. We witness waking dreams in swarms of gorgeous electrons.

The Japanese animation master made his name internationally with *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Spirited Away* (2001). The latter remains the best-selling movie in Japanese history, topping even *Titanic* and (so far) *Avatar*. Both hold elements common to the Miyazaki oeuvre: a plucky female protagonist, a reverence for nature (and fury over ecological failings), flying themes (Miyazaki's father made rudders for Japanese Zeroes), and mythology from Eastern and Western traditions.

My own love for Miyazaki comes from his earlier animations. I have watched *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989) a dozen times with my daughter. Miyazaki tells of a young girl who must leave her family to become a good witch, to make her own way in the world. My child and I thrill to this tale, especially its palette of 400 colors. *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) is also burned into memory, a nature tale in which a young girl from a troubled family befriends forest spirits. (Surely, there's some Totoro in *Avatar*.) On the headboard of my own bed I keep a forest spirit—Totoro himself, the stuffed-toy version. He watches over my dreams. **CHARLES MCNAIR**

19 CLINT EASTWOOD

BORN: 1930, San Francisco
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Mystic River* (2003)

Clint Eastwood has dissected America through his films for nearly 40 years, and he's only improved as a director, proving that age need not dull your bite. Eastwood's movies look so much like classical Hollywood, but the façade is a trap, leading people into theaters expecting formula and then finding instead some of the most hard-hitting, visceral filmmaking since Sam Fuller. Eastwood tackles the difficult questions of personal and national identity without pulling any punches, making modern life's moral ambiguity more digestible. He isn't a showy director, but his languorous, contemplative style is groundbreaking in its own silent way, forcing audiences to think about what's happening onscreen; in his hands, cinema is no mere escapism. Eastwood has had plenty of missteps, but you can be sure he truly believes in every frame. That kind of integrity is something that's both exceedingly rare and especially important. **SG**

18 ABBAS KIAROSTAMI

BORN: 1940, Tehran, Iran
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Taste of Cherry* (1997)

The most poetic of Iran's directors, Abbas Kiarostami won the Cannes Palme d'Or for his austere 1997 film *Taste of Cherry*, shifting the world's focus to the stark, neo-realistic cinema of post-revolutionary Iran. In Kiarostami's claustrophobic *Ten*, our gaze remains stuck on the woman driver and any number of her passengers as the agitated conversations touch upon the plight of Iranian women, as so many of the best Iranian filmmakers have done. *Through the Olive Trees* uses long takes and silences to map the emotional terrain of his female lead. But Kiarostami's concerns extend beyond the feminine, to questions of mortality, justice and the mystery of life. These riddles lie at the heart of his greatest works. **AB**

17 DAVID FINCHER

BORN: 1962 in Denver, Colo.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Fight Club* (1999)

When David Fincher stormed Hollywood in the early '90s, he changed the face of the postmodern thriller in a way that would've made Hitchcock jump out of his chair with joy. *Se7en* (1995) was one of the defining thrillers that inspired me to work within the genre. It made perfect sense that the director of such an iconic, unique film was previously the video director of choice for music icons like Madonna, Michael Jackson and Sting. Fincher had set the bar high, but in 1999, Ed Norton, Brad Pitt and a bar of soap enthralled fans in the mega-hit *Fight Club*, landing Fincher among the ranks of Hollywood's legendary directors. His mastery of the genre is exemplified in his distinct, cool-headed, fast-paced directing style. And the subtle way he weaves digital effects throughout films like *Panic Room* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* makes him an artist worthy of envy and admiration by his contemporaries. I'm just one of many directors who have been inspired by his compelling contributions, and who anxiously anticipate what he's going to do next. **MARC CLEBANOFF**

Marc Clebanoff is the award-winning writer/director of Break and is currently directing the web series The Darkness Descending.

Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*

16 HOU HSIAO-HSIEN

BORN: 1947, Meixian, China
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Hao nan hao nu (Good Men, Good Women)* (1995)

Hou Hsiao-Hsien is known for his ambitious aesthetics, but, despite the power of his long takes and careful compositions, he stays attuned to his characters and the politics of the world surrounding them. Always fascinated by a sense of passing time and dislocation, his style is motivated by some of the most poignant substance ever put to film. With his longtime screenwriter Chu Tien-wen, Hsiao-Hsien has boldly explored the repressed history of China and Taiwan and simultaneously blazed new trails in cinema with films that are improvised yet calculated, minute yet epic, universal yet uniquely Taiwanese. Even after 30 years of filmmaking, every Hsiao-Hsien movie still breaks ground. **SG**

15 LARS VON TRIER

BORN: 1956, Copenhagen, Denmark
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Breaking the Waves* (1996)

Amongst international directors, Lars von Trier is the class clown in a room full of serious straight-A students, free to joke and play games because he knows he's just as smart and talented as the rest of them. But his antics wouldn't be the least bit interesting if he weren't making top-notch work to back them up. After establishing his reputation with films like *The Element of Crime* and *Zentropa*, he used the 1998 Cannes Film Festival as the platform to announce the Dogme95 manifesto, a list of 10 rules designed to shift the emphasis of filmmaking away from flashy technique (something he'd become known for) and onto the performers. Whether it was a sly joke or not, the manifesto and the ideas behind Dogme95 have had a broader, deeper impact on filmmaking than anything else in my lifetime. The manifesto coincided with the creation of cheap digital cameras and ushered in a new generation of filmmakers. Of course, von Trier abandoned the Dogme philosophy after one project, but you can't expect the most exciting filmmaker in the world to follow any set of rules for long—even his own. **JOE SWANBERG**

Joe Swanberg is the director of Nights and Weekends, LOL *and* Kissing on the Mouth.

Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man*

12 JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE

BORN: 1951, Awirs, Belgium; 1954, Engis, Belgium **CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT:** *L'enfant (The Child)* (pictured above, 2005)

The canon is rife with movies about the seedy underbelly of one society or another. But rarely are they as gently told and ultimately affecting as those of the Dardenne brothers. They first emerged with *La Promesse* (1996), and since *Rosetta* in 1999, each of their films has competed at Cannes and won a major prize, including two that won the prestigious Palme d'Or—the only Belgian films to win the prize in Cannes history. In work like *Le fils*, *L'enfant* and last year's *Le silence de Lorna*, the Dardennes introduced their audience to homeless youngsters, day laborers, addicts, mobsters—people on the fringes of Belgian society looking desperately for redemption. Though characters betray one another, commit crimes and otherwise act heinously, these stories—told without sentimentality or sensationalism—treat their subjects with a quiet empathy. Given slightly different circumstances, we might be them. **AW**

14 FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

Born: 1939, Detroit
Crowning Achievement: *The Godfather* (1972)

He made *The Godfather*. Also, *Apocalypse Now*—an all-time classic war film. Also, *Godfather II*—which everyone on Earth acknowledges as the world's greatest sequel. Also, *The Conversation*—a slept-on study of paranoia. Also, some other movies. But mostly, he made *The Godfather*—an epic parable of power, a wrenching examination of family dynamics, a sprawling tale of immigration and ambition. It may well be the single greatest movie by any living human. If he'd never made another film, he'd still belong on this list. **NICK MARINO**

13 WERNER HERZOG

BORN: 1942, Munich, Germany
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Grizzly Man* (2005)

The more you learn about Werner Herzog the more his life sounds worthy of a Werner Herzog documentary. The 67-year-old filmmaker—who's produced, written and directed more than 50 films, and was once shot by a sniper's air-rifle during an on-camera interview, but kept on chatting—grew up in a remote Bavarian village, mostly isolated from the modern world (he didn't make a phone call until he was 17). Despite his sequestered upbringing, Herzog always knew he wanted to pursue film, making his first picture at age 19. His greatest contribution to the cinematic world was his 2005 film *Grizzly Man*, which documented the exploits of Timothy Treadwell, a bleach-blond outdoorsman who dedicated years of his life to "protecting" a group of bears in Alaska, only to be eaten by a grizzly in 2003. It's a strange tale, the kind Herzog was perfectly suited to tell. **ANNA SWINDLE**

11 WES ANDERSON

Wes Anderson on the set of *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*

BORN: 1969, Houston **CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT:** *Rushmore* (1998)

If there's one term associated with the films of alterna-auteur Wes Anderson, it's that go-to and played-out shorthand for idiosyncratic art: capital-q Quirk. It's a lazy summation of his meticulous directing and corresponding obsession with rostrum camera shots—but it's also, well, true. The baroque specificity about the most trivial aspects of Anderson's characters, sets and costumes is precisely why he's a figurehead of modern cinema. After his breakout 1998 bildungsroman *Rushmore*, a new template for critical success, modest-to-good box office returns, and cult-classic status energed. The era of hermetically-sealed, impeccably soundtracked films about introverts and their ornate biographies had arrived.

For more than a decade, Anderson has spun ornate, unforgettable yarns about broken families, lost loves and the sundry foibles of his characters, usually played by some configuration of Jason Schwartzman, Bill Murray and the Wilson brothers. His films have been set on inky high seas (*The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*) and a perpetual procession of sun-baked Indian terrain (*The Darjeeling Limited*), but Anderson is most interested in a more treacherous landscape—human relationships. No living director has his prodigal knack for taking life's small, seemingly meaningless moments—and yes, all its quirks—and making us realize they're damn near universal. **MS**

10 WONG KAR-WAI

BORN: 1958, Shanghai, China
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT:
In The Mood for Love (2001)

There's a perfect moment not long into Hong Kong auteur Wong Kar-Wai's 2001 masterpiece *In The Mood for Love*. In beautiful slow motion, a woman in a breathtaking dress ascends a staircase, followed by a graceful man in a suit. It's a few seconds of footage that I could watch for hours on loop. Like most of his films, it's lavishly costumed—Maggie Cheung wears six different immaculate dresses in the first five minutes alone—and lovingly shot. This love story luxuriates in the absence of consummation, which only adds to the allure. And then there's 1994's brilliant *Chungking Express*, with its depiction of desperate big-city loneliness, the cinematic equivalent of a Hopper painting. Quentin Tarantino famously announced that he wept with sheer joy when he first saw it. Ordinary filmmakers don't elicit these kinds of reactions. **MICHAEL DUNAWAY**

9 DAVID LYNCH

BORN: 1946, Missoula, Mont. **CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT:** *Mulholland Dr.* (2001)

After Stanley Kubrick's death in 1999, many filmmakers laid claim to the mantle of Quintessential Modern Filmmaker. But few have borne that elusive "-ian" suffix on their last name as completely and naturally as David Lynch. His films play out as reconfigured versions of Kubrick's existential meditations, bursting the pigeonholes in which mystified critics often attempt to place him. Lynch's formative years were spent in several rural and suburban towns, a tableau which served him well as a setting for many of his films and the cult-classic TV series *Twin Peaks*. He exploded to the forefront of avant-garde cinema in 1977 with *Eraserhead*, a dark, violent neo-noir set in an industrial wasteland (a not-so-subtle nod to his college years in Philadelphia). Lynch's style is wholly unique: the geographical version of Cronenberg's body horror, where the oft-nightmarish surreality lurking beneath the orderly façade of small-town American life suddenly materializes in a barrage of half-recognizable imagery. Lynch's films are beautiful, disturbing and convoluted. They're unflinchingly true-to-life for those very same reasons. In episode eight of *Twin Peaks*, the Log Lady asks, in her Cassandric style, "Do answers come in dreams?" The viewer might not realize it, but the show's creator is the one posing the query, and it's entirely rhetorical. In Lynch's oeuvre, as in life, the questions and their mystifying answers only brush with the outer contours of consciousness. **MS**

8 QUENTIN TARANTINO

BORN: 1963, Knoxville, Tenn. **CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT:** *Pulp Fiction* (1994)

Over the last two decades, the most common criticisms of Quentin Tarantino's filmmaking have aged badly. The claim that he's merely imitating previous films can't account for truly original ideas like rewriting the end of WWII, or staging the Buddhist path to enlightenment as a series of kung fu masters who must be defeated. His tics—violence as a resolution to all problems, an unabashed love for all things pop culture—remain, but these aspects of his filmmaking are both the easiest to imitate and least important. What's unique is how Tarantino satisfies his audiences' most puerile impulses while forcing them to consider the full ramifications of those desires. This allows him to pay loving homage to certain genres while blowing them up—both literally and figuratively. Nearly 20 years after his first full-length work, there's still no one who makes films that look like Tarantino's, and there never will be. **SG**

➥ Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*

↳ Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood*

7 WOODY ALLEN

Born: 1935, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Crowning Achievement: *Annie Hall* (1977)

Woody Allen—auteur, comedian, nebbish narcissist, existentialist, clarinetist—is not exactly a man of many hats. He's just spent his 45-year directorial career wearing the same hat in all manner of styles. Marked by a colossal wit and a comically nihilistic worldview, Allen's imprint is so distinct it's impossible to imagine his movies—be they comedies, psychodramas or films whose ostensible subject is Scarlett Johansson's cleavage—as made by anyone else. Love him or hate him, there's no denying Woody at his best. **ADAM WILSON**

6 PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON

Born: 1970, Studio City, Calif.
Crowning Achievement: *Magnolia* (1999)

You know when the lights come up at the end of the movie, and you feel like you've been taken on such a whirlwind journey that you actually have to calm down for a few minutes before you can stand up? This happens to me at most once a year, and five of those occasions were the collected works of P. T. Anderson.

Magnolia alone would make him one of the greatest living American directors. Who else could drop thousands of frogs from the sky midway through an otherwise grounded tale of lonely souls in the San Fernando Valley, and somehow make us feel that it's only thing that could have possibly happened at that moment? That's an insane command of one's craft!

He was only 26 when he made his first feature film (*Hard Eight*), and he's always had an inborn instinct for creating the perfect dialogue, music cue, camera move or juxtaposition of images. He knows when to be fancy and when to be restrained.

But all of his movies have serious balls: In *Punch-Drunk Love*, he brilliantly deconstructed Adam Sandler's screen persona. *Boogie Nights*, *There Will Be Blood*—each movie is a soup of his influences, thematic obsessions and source material. And it's all filtered, cooked and re-cast in service of his unmistakable voice.

Anderson operates on a higher plane than most of us who claim to "direct movies," and he's not even 40 years old! One of my biggest filmmaking heroes is younger than me! What the hell? **DAVID WAIN**

David Wain is the director of Wet Hot American Summer *and* Role Models, *and the creator/star of the online series Wainy Days.*

5 STEVEN SODERBERGH

BORN: 1963, Atlanta
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Traffic* (2000)

Most major filmmakers have what jazz musicians used to call a "bag." A bag is a creative trademark, like "The Master of Suspense." Tim Burton shoots phantasmagorical tales, always with Johnny Depp. Todd Haynes' postmodern style never fails to remind us of his semiotics degree from Brown. Steven Soderbergh's bag is that he doesn't have one. Over the course of 21 films in two decades—he's probably finishing no. 22 as you read this—the man has applied himself to every kind of genre, every size of budget and every kind of movie.

Who else, in the same year, delivers a four-hour panoramic war epic redolent of vintage David Lean (*Che*) with an Oscar-winner in the heroic lead, then turns around and makes a wholly improvised, no-budget experiment (*The Girlfriend Experience*) whose only professional actor is a porn star (though tellingly, one who cites Jean-Luc Godard as her favorite director)? Neither film got much conventional theatrical distribution: *Che* toured like an old-fashioned cinema roadshow. *GFE*, befitting its callgirl-as-metaphor plot, was available on demand.

At heart, Soderbergh is as indie as he was in 1989, when *Sex, Lies and Videotape* announced a new wave in American moviemaking. His skill at harnessing the celebrity power of all his *Oceans Eleven* buddies—Clooney, Damon, Roberts, etc.—to drive Academy Award nominations and the occasional box-office bonanza shows he's savvier than most. And he never stops shooting (literally: Soderbergh is often his own cinematographer), letting commercial projects feed his off-season ventures into avant-garde narrative and documentary. (The new *And Everything Is Going Fine* is a posthumous tribute to Spalding Gray.) Though parts of his oeuvre are dated or quixotic, Soderbergh's commitment to new technology and his drive to anatomize the complex ironies of contemporary life make him the most complete filmmaker working. He's got too much going on to fit into anyone's bag. **SD**

Joel and Ethan Coen on the set of *Burn After Reading*

Joel and Ethan Coen photo by Macall Polay

4 JOEL AND ETHAN COEN

BORN: 1954 and 1957 in St. Louis Park, Minn.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Fargo* (1996)

Flannery O'Connor once argued that if a story is going to try for wholesomeness, it needs to start by being *whole*. Whichever way we interpret the universe of Joel and Ethan Coen, we're compelled to admit that the brothers have created just that world: one scandalously, enigmatically and often embarrassingly whole. They run us through the ringer (or the woodchipper) while we wonder what exactly they had in mind, and why.

Their films tease us with incongruent details that ultimately tie their vision together. Take *Fargo*, in which pregnant police investigator Marge Gunderson (played by Coen regular—in work and matrimony—Frances McDormand) finds her murder investigation interrupted by an ambiguous meeting with a depressed high school flame who proves to be a pathological liar. What does *this* have to do with *that*? Why does Gabriel Byrne's Reagan in *Miller's Crossing* have a recurring dream about losing his hat? Where do we place the constant references to the Book of Daniel in *Barton Fink*?

As with all classic artistic expressions, these films are gifts that never stop giving. Their meanings are ever dawning. But the Coens themselves generally eschew any hint of the highfalutin'. A connection between *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and Homer was publicly acknowledged just long enough for the brothers to insist that neither of them had ever read it. And few Coen characters are destroyed with as much meticulous, painstaking care as the pretentiously socialist playwright Barton Fink (masterfully portrayed by John Tuturro). "I guess I try to make a difference," he intones. But for the Coens, his self-professed love for "the common man" is as incoherent as the distinction between high and low culture. They're in it for laughs, and will leave no sacred cow untipped. In *A Serious Man*, they go to great lengths to place the lyrical wisdom of Jefferson Airplane squarely within the ancient tradition of rabbinic wisdom, one more morsel of cosmic plainspeak useful for our instruction. It's a folk process that demands constant comedic refurbishment and relentless retelling. This is how the work gets done.

Whether's it's Sam Elliott's Stranger avowing that The Dude abides, "takin' her easy for all us sinners," or Moses the Clockman deriding the delusions of Jennifer Jason Leigh in *The Hudsucker Proxy*, our guides constantly discourage us from thinking too deeply or obsessing over where to file the tale we're being told. Worrying over such questions (tragedy or comedy? fact or fiction? should I be laughing or crying?) is the sort of fastidiousness that will stand in the way of paying heed, of seeing what we see. Whether looking hard upon dysfunction or dignity, the Coens are hellbent on giving us the whole. And if we remember the way *The Big Lebowski* only came to life, for most viewers, years after its theatrical release, we might do well to reconsider the supposed flops (*The Ladykillers*, *Burn After Reading*, *The Man Who Wasn't There*). The classics, after all, take time. **DAVID DARK**

Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*

3 STEVEN SPIELBERG

BORN: 1946 in Cincinnati, Ohio **CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT:** *Schindler's List* (1993)

More than anyone else on this list, Spielberg understands and embodies the contemporary blockbuster. So while we have him to blame for *Transformers* (which he executive produced), we also have him to thank for *Avatar* (which, with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and the immortal *E.T.*, he foreshadowed). Crass commercialism for the masses? We don't think so. We think Spielberg works in the tradition of *Citizen Kane*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *The Wizard of Oz*. He likes his movies *big*. We appreciate intimate art-house fare as much as anyone, but sometimes we like our movies big, too.

So a tip of the cap to the man behind 1981's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the prototypical action/adventure flick. Three cheers for *Jurassic Park*, which left us gobsmacked back in 1993 at how real those freaking dinosaurs looked. And a hearty huzzah for 1975's *Jaws*, which still sends tremors of fear through any ocean-going swimmers who stop to consider what's lurking just beneath their bare feet.

His catalog isn't all fluff. Terrorism? Slavery? The Holocaust? Serious people who like serious films can spend a whole weekend pondering *Munich*, *Amistad* and *Schindler's List*. The man's pedigree is unimpeachable. **NM**

2 JEAN-LUC GODARD

BORN: 1930, Paris **CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT:** *Breathless* (1960)

In his 1966 film *Masculine-Feminine*, French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard flashes an intertitle proclaiming, "Philosopher and filmmaker share a way of being, an outlook on life that embodies a generation." As the audience reads that line, gunshots ring out in the darkness. The viewer's mind ponders as the body is made to flinch and jump, the intellectual process riddled with gangster-film tropes. Between highbrow art house and pop fare (or as another intertitle puts it, "The children of Marx and Coca-Cola"), therein resides Godard.

No single essay can summarize five decades of filmmaking. A scrutinization of Godard's prolific first seven years of work—14 singular, stunning, still-enigmatic manifestos bookended by 1960's *Breathless* (the first shot fired from the French New Wave canon) and his au revoir to narrative cinema, 1967's *Weekend*—is a daunting task. Godard, like Dylan in America, became a philosopher and unwitting spokesperson for his generation, putting those turbulent times before his audience's eyes and j'accusing: "But something is happening and you don't know what it is, do you?"

Godard's massive body of work bridges the gap between classic cinema, be it American post-war studio fare, France's golden age of film, or Italian neo-realism and the hyperactive consumer culture that followed. His filmmaking reveals a ravenous and omnivorous intellectual appetite, taking in the deepest epistemological and semantic concerns—Dadaism and anarchy, the political upheaval and brutality of war and the latest in pop trends—and making them into heady, mesmeric cinematic statements. He anticipates our own 21st-century tendencies toward assimilation and multitasking; it's not unfounded to consider him the first blogger, able to process disparate strands of thought and release them in real time.

Examine any one of his films and you see where Godard's head is. For his punk-rock debut, *Breathless*, he's taken with B-movie house Monogram Pictures, Humphrey Bogart, French-noir director Jean-Pierre Melville, and his star-crossed female lead, Jean Seberg. 1967's postmodern *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* juxtaposes the urban development of Paris with suburban prostitution; the failure of cinema to truly convey sensorial data dovetails with a sense of helplessness about the escalation of Vietnam. He tackles the banality of modernity, the worthlessness of consumerism. Godard's harrowing 1976 effort, *Here and Elsewhere* combines the Palestinian massacre with the futility of film to change the world.

And yet Godard has changed the world of film. In our top 10 alone, we can gauge his lasting influence: Soderbergh, P.T. and Wes Anderson, Tarantino, Wong Kar-Wai. Surprisingly, many of Godard's nouvelle vague contemporaries remain, several of them making our list (see Agnès Varda #22, Chris Marker #31, Alain Resnais #33). For all his insouciance and disavowal of "bourgeoisie" filmmaking, Godard had become an old master himself. For 2001's In *Praise of Love*, he visually echoes fauvism, Bresson's *Pickpocket* and Cocteau's *Orphée*, while slighting Steven Spielberg and the American revisionism of European history. His outlook on life continues to influence a new generation. **AB**

1 MARTIN SCORSESE

[BY STEVE DOLLAR]

BORN: 1942 in Queens, N.Y.
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT: *Raging Bull* (1980)

In this post-*Avatar* age, filmmakers may increasingly find themselves creating digital "events" constructed with software and blue screens. But fundamentally, what they do is *make films*. Martin Scorsese, though, he's a little different. He makes films but he also kind of *is* film.

He's the name most likely dropped by aspiring film students as their role model, the Oscar-winning (finally!) American master crusading to save museum film programs and rescue deteriorating reels of rare classics, the burly-browed motormouth who spoofs himself in American Express commercials and inspired Rob Reiner's loving caricature of him as rock documentarian Marty DiBergi in *This Is Spinal Tap*. And, yeah, he's shot at least one movie—1980's *Raging Bull*—that is damn near perfect.

As the art form of the 20th century radically transforms in the face of the new millennium and its emerging technologies, the asthmatic Catholic boy who once abandoned the seminary for the silver screen looks more and more like cinema's greatest hero.

He's one of the good fellas, an artist whose devotion to the medium flickers with the awestruck majesty of movies at their most epic, old-fashioned peak. He seems to have swallowed film history whole, from D.W. Griffith to Roberto Rossellini to Michael Powell to Elia Kazan to John Cassavetes. Biographers latch onto his sickly childhood spent hooked on WOR-TV's *Million Dollar Movie*, and captivated by Howard Hawks' *Land of the Pharaohs*. The young Marty may have been too fragile for the fisticuffs that were as natural as breathing in the Italian-American neighborhoods that nurtured him. But an obsessive self-schooling in swords, sandals and Cinemascope fired an ambition and imagination that would translate the elemental intensity of his immediate world into the visceral images, staccato verbal riffage and shattering emotional themes of his movies.

Coming of age in the 1960s and beginning his real career in the 1970s, Scorsese belonged to the generation of directors who would eventually have the same impact on American film that Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut had in Paris in the late 1950s, when they broke every imaginable rule of French cinema. Scorsese put his signature on New York stories: *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*—a trilogy so potent that people now probably forget he got a leg up with Roger Corman (*Boxcar Bertha*) and was a feminist-for-hire with *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, which won Ellyn Burstyn an Oscar. *New York, New York* would indirectly do even more for the

AGAIN AND AGAIN, SCORSESE RETURNS TO THE ELEMENTAL AMERICAN STORIES; MYTHOLOGIES WRITTEN IN THE BLOOD OF IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR CHILDREN, AND FRAMED THROUGH THE PRISM OF FILM HISTORY.

career of Frank Sinatra (who Scorsese is soon to consider on film, says the Internet Movie Database, with Leonardo DiCaprio as Ol' Blue Eyes). *The Last Waltz* may be the most cherished concert documentary ever made, a farewell not only to The Band, but ostensibly to the 1960s as a whole (although he has since cirlced back, time and again).

Regardless, the director's Big Three pictures remain central to his legacy, partly thanks to Robert DeNiro's coiled and crackling presence of at the core of each. Scorsese's alter ego, playing off of regulars like Harvey Keitel and Joe Pesci, is a lightning rod for violence and self-destruction; whether as doomed punk Johnny Boy, psychopathic would-be assassin Travis Bickle or animalistic boxing champ Jake LaMotta, De Niro gives urgent, bruising performances that decimate the screen. Meanwhile, Scorsese's camerawork and editing do as much to keep the pace in the grimy, neon noir of *Taxi Driver*'s Times Square as in the luminous black-and-white of *Raging Bull*'s 1940s Bronx. Guilt, loss, trauma, loyalty, betrayal, psychological and physical torture, bloodshed and redemption are all part of a machismo that can't easily articulate itself in words—*"You talkin' to me?"*—but nonetheless succeeds through dialogue as forceful, and painful, as a bare-knuckled punch.

Critics and audiences will debate all that Scorsese has given us since (which includes the new 1950s thriller *Shutter Island*, starring DiCaprio, his recent leading-man of choice), but the guts and vitality never left Scorsese's pictures, even those that don't immediately come to mind. Sometimes it's more revealing to gauge a director by efforts thought to be less essential. *The King of Comedy*? One of Scorsese's very best, a stupendously cracked meditation on the nature of celebrity, and a natural sequel to *Taxi Driver*, with the oddest ménage a trois imaginable: De Niro, Sandra Bernhard and Jerry Lewis, all playing it straight. *The Color of Money*? A key entry in the canon of Paul Newman's "lion-in-winter" portrayals, and a scene (set to Warren Zevon's "Werewolves of London") that harnesses a hyper Tom Cruise with choreographic zeal. *After Hours*? A satirical anatomy of downtown Manhattan in the *Slaves of New York* era that has the sly glimmer of Bunuel—and an amazing moment with Verna Bloom. *Cape Fear*? De Niro, once again a menace to society, able to strike terror with four nonsense syllables: *fee-fi-fo-fum*. And how about *Gangs of New York*? A messy disappointment, but absolutely brutal commitment from Daniel Day-Lewis—with the martial mojo of Othar Turner's Rising Star Fire & Drum Band rumbling through the soundtrack.

Even when Scorsese isn't striking major chords, he has reached a level of mastery that can elevate almost any ordinary moment to what cornballs call "movie magic." *Goodfellas*, the 1990 mob saga that is arguably Scorsese's most enduringly popular film, blasted through the viewer's consciousness much like the endless cocaine bumps that turned rising wiseguy Henry Hill (Ray Liotta) into a jittery paranoid fiend. The movie gives you an exhilarating contact high and then faceplants you smack into Hill's deflated reality as a gangster forced to change identities and start life anew as a total Joe Schmoe. Perhaps this is all a flashback to the director's troubled spell after making *The Last Waltz*, when he was nearly consumed by his own addiction. And maybe that's why *Goodfellas*' showstoppers feel so fully visceral: the elegant, extended tracking shot in the nightclub, the manic "Monkey Man" montage.

Scorsese's love of rock 'n' roll, blues and vintage American pop pulses through his films. He's made concert movies concussive with technique (*Shine a Light*, with the Rolling Stones) and encyclopedic documentaries (*No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*) which will stand as the definitive word. His narrative films are sometimes such relentless jukeboxes—*The Departed*, *Casino*—that it feels like overkill. Yeah, man, I love "Layla," too, but can I just sit back without all the rock-historical resonance and enjoy this moment with Jack Nicholson and that severed hand in the Ziploc baggie?

Then again, nah! C'mon, it's *Marty*. No way do you get to sit back and study on anything. He's reaching out with both hands and dragging you head-first into all the tension and chaos and blood and glory his characters are experiencing. And when it's all done, you're going to be rattled and shaken and really, really *alive*.

Again and again, Scorsese returns to the elemental American stories; mythologies written in the blood of immigrants and their children, and framed through the prism of film history. No other living director's catalog is as complete, or could read so compellingly as visual literature. Maybe the notion of the Great American Novel has long gone out the window because it was such a concept of the '50s and '60s—the eras that shaped Scorsese—but one day we will see the passionate totality of his work for what it really is: some of the finest literature of our time, penned on celluloid. *Fin*

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THE CHILLS

Sigur Rós frontman's solo debut proves he's more than just a pretty voice. BY JASON KILLINGSWORTH

JÓNSI
Go XL

There's this thing Jón Þór Birgisson does with his voice. You can hear it nearly three-and-a-half minutes into the track "Grow Till Tall" on *Go*, his first solo record after more than a decade fronting Icelandic ambient-rock outfit Sigur Rós. Jónsi's fragile, luminescent tenor begins a subtle dance, climbing a few notes up the scale to a moderate plateau and then sliding back down, ascending once more to a comparable altitude, then gliding all the way back down to Earth like a well-built paper airplane. He patiently follows this trance-inducing pattern for a minute or more, creating the illusion of a low vocal ceiling. And then, just as Nico Muhly's orchestral score begins to swell and fidget restively, Jónsi's voice suddenly lifts off into the exosphere—effortlessly, like a column of steam rising. By the time his voice reaches its zenith, it's morphed into a glistening, siren-song falsetto. It would take a philosopher or a theologian, not a music critic, to explain why this voice ties the human throat in knots.

Though unmistakably beautiful, the moody, operatic drama of "Grow Till Tall" and album closer "Hengilas"—a track so intimately arranged that you can distinctly hear the steady-droning horn players gasping periodically for breath—tell an incomplete story. *Go* could be an exercise in repackaging Sigur Rós's darker instrumental output and slapping fresh cover art on the front, but—mercifully—it isn't. What Jónsi claims began as "a low-key, acoustic record" quickly chewed the lock off its conceptual cage and began mutating as wildly as a *Gremlins* mogwai that's been fed a bag of gummy worms after midnight.

Listening to the giddy, fluttering woodwinds that grace album opener "Go Do," you'd be forgiven for thinking you were listening to the soundtrack of a Disney movie starring cheery, anthropomorphic woodland creatures. An insistent kick drum pounds out the time as Jónsi sings, "You always know that we can do anything." The first time I heard the phrase belly-flop off his lips, I groaned inwardly: What is this gauzy, pseudo-inspirational twaddle? But the more I digested the record, the more I sensed Jónsi's excitement about having a blank artistic canvas to work on. Outside of the reassuring confines of Sigur Rós, the phrase "we can do anything" is more about reveling in exploratory possibility than peddling a motivational greeting-card nugget.

In truth, it's a little strange to be parsing Jónsi's lyrics in the first place. The man has spent the majority of his career slouching behind inscrutable declarations, alternating between Icelandic and the impressionistic 'Hopelandic' syllables he scattered across Sigur Rós' *( )* album. The snowblind packaging of that record even contained a booklet with mostly blank pages, on which you could presumably transcribe what you imagined was being sung. This approach invited listeners to hang their own idiosyncratic mental portraits on the band's magnificent aural set pieces, and Jónsi's refusal to sing in English became a key ingredient to the music's unique flavor.

Jónsi sings about three quarters of *Go* in English and the rest in Icelandic, but his now-apparent shortcomings as a lyricist weaken the overall emotional impact of his compositions. On "Tornado," he sings, "You grow from the inside / Destroy everything through / Destroy from the inside ... You fall through the inside / You kill everything through." The song's metronomic opening piano chords and sullen tone feel like a more straightforward reworking of Radiohead's "Pyramid Song," ironing out the constantly shifting, seasick meter that made Thom Yorke's ballad so memorable and emotionally disconcerting—it might be a little better if we didn't know what Jónsi was saying.

Jónsi chose a remarkable cast of collaborators to flesh out the songs on *Go*, and their varied influences leave indelible marks. Most notable is the contribution of acclaimed composer and Philip Glass protégé Nico Muhly, who's worked with artists such as Björk, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy and Antony Hegarty. Muhly's orchestral imagination is fertile and wonderfully elastic, stretching to fit *Go*'s kaleidoscopic moods and vocal textures. The album's crown jewel, "Sinking Friendships," strikes a sublime balancing act between instrumental dynamism and vocal nuance—classical percussion, woodwinds, syncopated piano lines and cascading, multi-tracked "oohs." Jónsi has never approached his music with a traditional pop song structure in mind, and Muhly lets his arrangements duck and weave in similarly unpredictable directions.

Fans of Jon Brion's more bombastic production work will appreciate Muhly's sonic-toy-chest approach to "Animal Arithmetic." The tune strains at the leash for its entire duration like a manic Chihuahua, clattering along at 120 mph with cymbals crashing, drummer Samuli Kosminen's sticks ricocheting off of any surface in sight, and Jónsi spitting out sing-songy verses like jump-rope chants. It's easy to appreciate the exuberance on display, but this will probably be the track on the record that sends most listeners scrambling for the skip button. Don't be surprised if it spawns a seriously bumpin' David Guetta club remix.

> It's easy to forgive the album's occasional misfires because it doesn't tiptoe about, eyes glued to the floor, apologizing for its gargantuan ambition.

Jónsi shares *Go*'s production credit with collaborator/boyfriend Alex Somers (the pair released an ambient duo album called *Riceboy Sleeps* in July 2009) and Peter Katis (The National, Interpol), at whose Connecticut studio major sections of the album were recorded. The three of them deserve a Grammy for not only keeping track of the record's dizzying volume of sonic layers, but for grooming everything to coexist with such confounding rightness. It's easy to forgive the album's occasional misfires because it doesn't tiptoe about, eyes glued to the floor, apologizing for its gargantuan ambition. It does cartwheels when it bloody well feels like it, cries when it wants to, and raises the bar for songwriters like Sufjan Stevens who share similarly heady classical predilections.

8.0

➥ JASON KILLINGSWORTH IS *PASTE*'S GAMES EDITOR.

Photo by Lilja Birgisdottir and Inga Birgisdottir

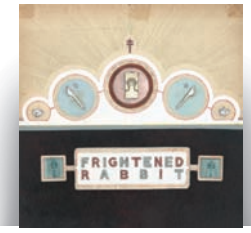
RUN, RABBIT, RUN

Scottsmen stretch their legs on ambitious third album

BY BRIAN HOWE

FRIGHTENED RABBIT

The Winter of Mixed Drinks FAT CAT



"What's the blues when you've got the greys?" asked Scott Hutchison on Frightened Rabbit's charming 2006 debut, *Sing the Greys*. The Scottish band—formed around Scott and his brother Grant—put a scrappy spin on apathy and cynicism. They were raucous, but with great economy: Scott's fuzzy guitar jittered and popped like oil in a pan as Grant bashed out frantic rhythms, hammering beats like nails into the music's woody grain. A great care for craft lurked behind the splintered finish of the songs, and clear, infectious melodies rang out amid the washes of distortion. Scott's voice—a creaky burr—whip-cracked over the galloping riffs as if he were a drunken charioteer. They claimed they didn't care, but they sure sounded like they did.

What does a frightened rabbit do? It runs. On *Sing the Greys*, the band already seemed to be lunging ahead of itself, always in a hurry to get to the next song, the next idea. So when superb sophomore set *The Midnight Organ Fight* appeared a year after Fat Cat reissued *Greys*, it was no surprise that they'd begun to take themselves more seriously. On *The Winter of Mixed Drinks*, the new release, the band's ambition has increased apace. Frightened Rabbit is still good at juxtaposing minimal passages with rousing dynamic swoops. But more than ever before, their songs are sandbagged with sighing keyboards, screaming layers of melodious distortion, nested rhythms, choral harmonies—all the doodads that rock bands are liable to employ circa album number three. These more laborious arrangements occasion stirring moments on the epic scale of Coldplay or U2; this is burnished, stadium-sized, cloud-cover rock, so much so that the vocal melodies—what you'll actually carry away from the towering arrangements—sometimes feel beset, almost overwhelmed.

The change is more one of scale than style. Hutchison's earthy, inviting voice cuts through the vast instrumentation like a ray of sunlight. This is a different sort of intimacy: *The Winter of Mixed Drinks* is less of a breakup record than a post-breakup record, the more pathetic feelings having hardened into self-reliant moxie. "This is a story and you're not in it," Hutchison snipes on "Nothing Like You"—which is to say he's all alone. The music dwarfs his human-sized voice, emphasizing his smallness and solitude. Hutchison offers the usual wallowing introspection and off-kilter epiphanies ("She was not the cure for cancer," he suddenly gleans midway through the album), but from a bird's-eye view. On lead single "Swim Until You Can't See Land," which includes a string arrangement by labelmate Hauschka, the singer is a tiny, bobbing speck, way out past the waves, nothing but a sea of chiming guitars and swooning strings on all sides. This is the sound of a band disappearing into itself.

Frightened Rabbit wrings a winning simplicity from all this august isolation. A cardiac pulse animates many of the songs,

> Hutchison is a tiny, bobbing speck, way out past the waves, nothing but chiming guitars and swooning strings on any side. This is the sound of a band disappearing into its self.

a mightily thwacking unison at the core of all the kaleidoscopic embellishment. Sprightly rhythms still canter through the drafty corridors. "Things" morphs a striving electric-guitar riff into airborne rills of melody, like a thunderhead gathering and breaking. The noise-drenched "Skip The Youth" and the wriggly "The Loneliness and the Scream" develop as guitars and drums clash rigidly alongside some repetitive sound, everything gradually warping into a sweeping melody. The songs move through passages of dense occlusion and beaming clarity. A few airier moments leaven all the starchy rock. "The Wrestle" gets by on little more than a melodious bass line and some ticking guitar. And "Man/Bag Of Sand" sounds like old Frightened Rabbit playing new Frightened Rabbit, with its impassioned, raw-boned acoustic reprisal of "Swim Until You Can't See Land."

Loneliness does strange things to a person; you argue with yourself via proxies. On *The Winter of Mixed Drinks*, Hutchison veers between teenaged dismissals of "all this shit" and wrestling with the Holy Ghost. "I'm not miserable," he sings over an optimistic guitar lick on "Not Miserable," and he sounds as if he's slightly surprised, as if it's quite suddenly obvious. As the guitars of the next song, "Living in Colour," twist into the air, it totally is. No one here has the greys, not anymore.

7.0

Photo by Jannica Honey

DAWN LANDES

Sweet Heart Rodeo

COOKING VINYL

A little too sweet

Let's say you trust Brooklyn-via-Louisville singer/songwriter Dawn Landes when she says the title of her new album isn't a nod to The Byrds' 1968 country-rock classic. Fair enough—Roger McGuinn, Gram Parsons and company certainly weren't the first, and Landes won't be the last, to equate the ups and down of life and love to the tumult of a bareback ride. The real puzzler here is why she chose that title for the most restrained album of her already low-key career. Everything about it is even-keeled: From the synth-pumped admonishments of opening track "Young Girl" to the woozy, world-weary lamentation of "Wandering Eye" (her baby—hopefully not real-life husband Josh Ritter—has one, but she doesn't seem to care), Landes knows where she's headed at every turn. Given the wistful penultimate track, with its slow-pulling strings and shimmering flutes, that's a place called Brighton—a dreamy land of "carousels and mirror lights / a music box that plays all night." Still, the wooden equines of that merry-go-round are as close as she gets to a bucking bronco. *Sweet Heart* is beguiling, warm and wise, but it begs for a good kick in the ribs.

RACHAEL MADDUX 6.8

JOE PUG

Messenger

LIGHTNING ROD

Prodigious Chicago folksinger makes it look effortless

Some things can be learned: how to pick a few chords on the guitar, how to shut your eyes while you sing, how to wince *just so* during the bridge to convey emotional weight. But unless your surname is Dylan, Waits, Ritter or Prine, you could face-palm yourself to death trying to pen songs half as inspired as the 10 tracks on Joe Pug's debut full-length. Before moving to Chicago and writing his first songs, the 25-year-old folk phenom studied playwriting at the University of North Carolina; he dropped out, but he never quit honing his empathetic imagination. On "Bury Me Far (From My Uniform)," Pug sings in his pleading, nasally drawl, "War is older than mankind, but it's younger than grace ... Won't you bury me far from my uniform / So God might remember my face?" You could craft a more effective anti-war song, but it would probably involve plagiarizing Wilfred Owen's WWI poetry. Throughout *Messenger*, Pug demonstrates his understanding that life is full of battlefields, and that injuries sustained on the fiercest one of all—our endlessly bombarded, shrapnel-pierced hearts—only have one cure: more pedal steel.

JASON KILLINGSWORTH 9.1

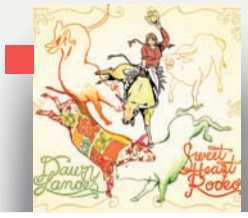
JOSH ROUSE

El Turista YEP ROC

(Yet) Another side of Josh Rouse

Expat singer/songwriter Josh Rouse is a musical chameleon, exploding into beautiful new aural shades with each record. His 2003 album, *1972*, was a tribute to the AM pop and proto-disco sounds of his birth year. Two years later, he released *Nashville*, which explored a more contemporary fusion of folk rock and subtle electronic flourishes. But the biggest sonic shift came in 2006 when Rouse moved to Spain and began soaking up that country's rich culture. The result, *Subtitulo*, featured some Spanish-titled songs, a laidback feel and plenty of nylon-string guitar. On his latest, *El Turista*, Rouse takes things a step further, diving headfirst into jazzy, lushly orchestrated, early-'60s-indebted Spanish-language tunes that play like a cross between Astrud Gilberto's bossa-nova classics and Vince Guaraldi's *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. Rouse even ventures into *The Rhythm of the Saints*-era Paul Simon territory ("I Will Live on Islands") and channels Eric Burdon & War ("Lemon Tree"), stamping it all with his unmistakable croon.

STEVE LABATE 8.4



Dawn Landes photo by Alex Solmsson

TITUS ANDRONICUS

The Monitor XL

We have met the enemy, and he is us

If Bruce Springsteen sowed the seeds of small-town introspection, his fellow New Jerseyites Titus Andronicus are flooding the fields. The punk quintet deconstructed postindustrial life with its gut-wrenching debut, *The Airing of Grievances*. And the band's sophomore LP, *The Monitor*, crushes the rosy spectacles of heartland rock, peeling away the façade of barroom camaraderie to reveal an entire generation inured to those highs. The comedown is a deeply pessimistic exploration of Americana and its now-quixotic quest for authenticity, loosely tethered to a fictional Civil War-era travel narrative spanning the trackless forests between New Jersey and Massachusetts.

The band makes liberal use of quiet/loud/quiet counterpoints between vocals and instrumentation; muted guitar modulations explode with incendiary riffs and thunderous drums, then revert to quiet drone. Patrick Stickles' choked Oberstian yelp surfs the slow boil of opener "A More Perfect Union" for nearly two minutes before a wry lyrical nod ("Cause tramps like us, baby, we were born to die") introduces the lead guitar. Bluesy piano rocker "Titus Andronicus Forever" and the banjo-driven stomp of "Richard II" paint apocalyptic portraits of physically and spiritually wasted communities.

These heart-on-sleeve polemics are bookended by soliloquy and recitations of Abraham Lincoln's speeches that pop and hiss with warnings that "if destruction be our lot, we ourselves must be its author and finisher." Sprawling 14-minute closer "The Battle of Hampton Roads" is named after the Civil War naval stalemate between the Monitor and Merrimack ironclads, a futile battle echoed in Stickles' narration of ever-increasing self-destructive excess: "And there is no race more human / No one throws it away like they do."

For Titus Andronicus, there are no more glory days to be had in Jersey, or anywhere else. "The enemy is everywhere" is *The Monitor*'s twice-invoked refrain, the central thesis of an album that's both uncompromisingly bleak and impossible to ignore. **MICHAEL SABA** **9.1**

Photo by Bao Nguyen

LOCAL NATIVES

Gorilla Manor

FRENCHKISS

L.A. band's full-length debut bridges coasts

In recent years, West Coast rock has become hazier (No Age), noisier (HEALTH) and woodsier (Fleet Foxes) compared to the East Coast's more melodic (Grizzly Bear), cosmopolitan (Dirty Projectors) and experimental (Animal Collective) style. And with their much-anticipated full-length debut, former SXSW darlings Local Natives unify the camps, bridging Brooklyn's tumbling tribal rhythms, rousing choruses and sophisticated pop arrangements with the CSNY harmonies, guitar eruptions and straightforward hooks of their Left Coast neighbors. The band's clear vocals and well-cultured namedropping of European cities and NPR make Vampire Weekend an easy comparison, though the Natives' anthemic arrangements are more self-consciously grandiose. *Gorilla Manor* is a bit too much of an amalgamation of its bi-coastal influences to really stake out any territory of its own, but it's a handy synthesis of two prevailing sounds. **MATT FINK** 7.4

BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB

Beat the Devil's Tattoo

ABSTRACT DRAGON/VAGRANT

Bad attitude makes for good rock

Over the past nine years and five albums, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club has worked hard to craft a sound that's both familiar and undeniably its own: slow-pounding drums, jagged and droning guitars, Peter Hayes' dead-eyed vocals and the same too-cool attitude of that quiet dude at the bar who's flipping through the jukebox, playing The Velvet Underground's "Heroin" as if it'll get people dancing. While 2007's hollow *Baby 81* replaced good songs with excess attitude, *Beat the Devil's Tattoo* finds a balance in grimy blues licks ("War Machine"), catchy hooks ("Bad Blood") and some huge, slabs of rock ("Aya"). The ballads peek out from the shadows—bruised, but too tough to show it. Like any good biker gang, *Tattoo* finds home in a loud, smoky dive. **JUSTIN JACOBS** 7.2

THE WHIGS

In the Dark

ATO

Athens, Ga., rockers hit their stride

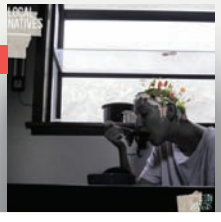
The Whigs banged through their first two albums with a rugged energy. It was stuff you wanted to love, but you'd be hard pressed to hum the songs an hour later. On *In the Dark* the band has paired its roadworthiness with greater ingenuity, and it finally feels like a fuse has been lit. "Kill Me Carolyne" hops around all crazy-eyed, and "I Am For Real" chugs with reflective purpose. The Whigs still break some guitar strings and drumheads along the way, but there's a wider range of textures and tones here—there's even a dose of Greg Dulli in the post-*Nuggets* stomp of "I Don't Even Care About The One I Love" and thinking man's bar-trawler "Someone's Daughter." The band's sound has become deeper, richer, more complex: suddenly they're serving up a pint of porter after a few rounds of Pabst. I'll drink to that. **JEFF LEVEN** 7.7

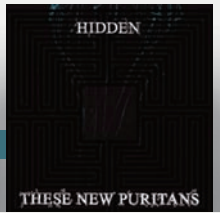
THESE NEW PURITANS

Hidden **DOMINO**

British foursome gets wonderfully bizarre on second album

You've heard music like this before, just not all in the same place. *Hidden* somehow synthesizes the concussive guitars and delirious chants of Liars, the cinematic industrial churn of Nine Inch Nails, brainy Reichian pattern music, Timbaland's spacey snap, and the moody winds and horns of composer Benjamin Britten. The disparate elements—cheap dance presets and six-foot Japanese drums, intricate Foley sound effects (the sort used in radio dramas), blitzkrieg guitars and springy synths, choral arrangements and angelic pianos—all interlock seamlessly. Seldom have classical delicacy, rock attitude and pop vitality coexisted with such improbable ease. On "Three-Thousand," a *Suspiria*-like ostinato and depth-charge bass blaze a path of destruction, while "Hologram" is gentle and buoyant. The ceremonially pounding madness of "We Want War" sums it up in spirit—a phantasmagorical call to arms. **BRIAN HOWE** 8.9





Black Rebel Motorcycle Club

EFTERKLANG

Magic Chairs 4AD

Echoes in a crowded room

If my non-existent Danish and the Internet serve me correctly, "Efterklang" means something like "reverberations" or "remembrances," and the beautiful duality of that half-translation captures the flavor of this band's music. With its third album, Efterklang has casually drifted from the more overtly classical structures of its earliest work toward tighter rock songs rendered with the elegance and precision of cut glass. Sprinkled throughout are familiar tones—fans of Sting, Arcade Fire and The National will all find friendly echoes throughout the album. Still, in a moment when orchestral gestures are all the rage, the album struggles at times to raise its head from the multi-instrumental pack; textured as it is, there's a muted quality to this collection that inevitably leaves ears slightly cold. It's pretty, but not always gripping. **JEFF LEVEN** 5.9

CLEM SNIDE

The Meat of Life

429 RECORDS

Beginning to rot

On his first albums with Clem Snide, singer Eef Barzelay's sincerity sounded subversive compared to the self-seriousness of most 1990s singer/songwriters. Today, either the times have caught up with him or his fire has smoldered out. On the band's seventh album, he sounds like any other musician (like Ben Gibbard or, for that matter, Owl City) whose voice blurs the distinctions between sentiment and sap. On "Wal-Mart Parking Lot" and "I Got High," Barzelay locates some beauty in the banality of shopping carts and censored porn, but such moments are few and far between. *The Meat of Life* hangs onto a terrible metaphor that crops up in several songs, resulting in the goofy innuendo of lines like, "To grow the meat of life, I will plant my seed." Meanwhile, the band favors lightweight strums and unobtrusive percussion, creating a lite-rock gloss that plagues even the jamming title track. To perpetuate the unfortunate titular metaphor one last time, there's just too little meat on these bones. **STEPHEN M. DEUSNER** 4.7

GIL SCOTT-HERON

I'm New Here

XL

A triumphant, if unlikely, comeback

After years of crime and punishment, casual obscurity and a half-sung hip-hop canonization, Gil Scott-Heron has released a new album. On it, he covers Smog, enlists a guitarist from Oakley Hall, samples Kanye West and invokes Burial, all with a scant sniff of regard for what anyone might have to say about it. The prophet of revolution smolders deeper into himself—a gnarled, wise tree in an urban glade. The album sounds heavy and elusive, like a field recording, and it will surely be studied with the most powerful of cultural microscopes, but its author will just puff cigarettes and chuckle. He will hang in your iPod, humored by his own acceptance of your invitation, and he will bare his soul with the same fearless stridency that made his name—defiant with a cold, weird dignity. **JEFF LEVEN** 8.2

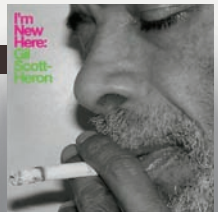
ROCKY VOTOLATO

True Devotion

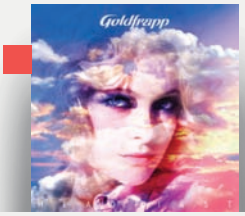
BARSUK

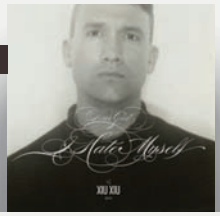
Lucky like a three-leaf clover

Rocky Votolato's latest offers 10 reminders of what a man can do with just a guitar and a poem. This album is an artifact from the Seattle songwriter's season of despair, and its simple instrumentation, understated harmonies and conversational lyrics give the story weight. Stunning strings set the tone in opener "Lucky Clover Coin," mimicking the longing stirred up by Votolato's narrative of seclusion, anxiety and lust for freedom. He sings, "The fruit will always show where the root is planted / I just want to come back home to you again / I just want to be free." And on closing track "Where We Started," hope finally overcomes. Form follows function in a viola reprise that echoes track one; the two create a sonic palindrome that recalls the album's prophetic, hopeful first line: "You found a three leaf clover coin / You said it was good luck and I think it will be." **CATHERINE PREWITT** 7.9



Efterklang photo by Nikolaj Holm Møller





GOLDFRAPP

Head First

MUTE

Thinking man's diva revels in '80s-pop artifice

Alison Goldfrapp never does anything halfway. From the icy, otherworldly electro-acoustic soundscapes of 2000's *Felt Mountain* to her subsequent romps through dance-pop and leering glam, she's become a more dangerous and dignified counterpart to the look-at-me theatrics of Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. Now, following an unexpected shift toward pastoral psych-pop on 2008's *Seventh Tree*, she and collaborator Will Gregory have circled back to dance music, this time with a pronounced emphasis on '80s synth-pop and Italo disco. Dusting off her most aggressively retro laser-beam synth settings, *Head First* evokes an era as much as a sound, offering instant gratification with bubbly hooks, nimble arrangements and relentlessly stylized production. Neither mysterious nor seductive, Goldfrapp vacillates between quiet longing and head-over-heels love tropes, rarely baring her fangs in the process. As both a concept and an insular set of songs, it works. But for an act that's always found its footing in the future, it's puzzling that the duo find their present rooted so firmly in the past. **MATT FINK** 6.2

BEN SOLLEE AND DANIEL MARTIN MOORE

Dear Companion

SUP POP

Mountain music with a message

Ben Sollee and Daniel Martin Moore have both released twangy, acclaimed solo albums in recent years, and they glide from song to song with smooth harmonies, minimal percussion and delicate string instruments on this debut collaboration. Produced by My Morning Jacket's Jim James, the record displays golden flecks of rock and bluegrass, mixing well with the steady swell of Sollee's cello. The three musicians, all Kentucky natives, tether a genuinie concern for their home region to the album, calling attention to the issue of mountaintop removal coal mining that plagues the Appalachians. Far from preachy, tracks like "Only a Song" and "Try" approach these issues through an unmistakably human lens, acknowledging the difficulty of choosing right from wrong. The record and its message simultaneously comfort and provoke. **CATHERINE PREWITT** 7.5

XIU XIU

Dear God, I Hate Myself

KILL ROCK STARS

Prolific angst merchant delivers sonic adventure

One of the most reliable sources of autobiographical despair, Xiu Xiu's Jamie Stewart would seem to have reached the point of self caricature with a title as over-the-top as *Dear God, I Hate Myself*. Fortunately, his scars run bone-deep. Earning its title, "Gray Death" is a harrowing synth-noise gem in which Stewart works himself into a fit of self-laceration, pleading for death while recounting the loss of a lover. Meanwhile, the "incredibly dumb, incredibly ugly" protagonist of "Chocolate Makes You Happy" has no recourse but to escape into comfort food he'll later vomit back up. And it only gets worse from there. But despite such tortured details, the seventh Xiu Xiu album may be the most playfully arranged and colorfully textured in the band's catalog. As co-producer and collaborator, Deerhoof's Greg Saunier gives the album bite and unpredictability, with nearly every track tripping down side roads of manically ping-ponging synths, sour countermelodies and churning shards of sonic debris. The only constant is Stewart, fearlessly riding his train as it slips the rails and eventually crashes at the steps of Morrissey's mope-rock temple. **MATT FINK** 8.1

Xiu Xiu, photo by Huy Ngo

BEYOND THE GRAVE

An elegiac farewell from a musical legend

BY ANDY WHITMAN

JOHNNY CASH

American VI: Ain't No Grave

AMERICAN RECORDINGS/LOST HIGHWAY

If *Ain't No Grave*, the final installment in Johnny Cash's rich collaboration with producer Rick Rubin, had appeared in, say, 1980, in the midst of an otherwise undistinguished run of Cash albums, it would have hardly caused a ripple. The raw ingredients—a few covers of well-known country hits, a couple of traditional folk songs, an original sacred composition—reprise the same formula that Cash employed since the early '70s. It had all been done before, and many times.

But because these are the final recordings (no, really, we mean it this time) of a musical titan who dominated half a century, the songs here will be scrutinized far more closely than his earlier material. You may recall the 2006 posthumous album *American V: A Hundred Highways*, formerly billed as the Man in Black's last musical will and testament. It turns out there

were 10 more tracks in the vault, recorded during the same 2002 and 2003 sessions that produced *American V*. Hence, *Ain't No Grave*.

This is clearly the inferior batch of tunes, rightly relegated to outtake status. But while the songs are sometimes slight and the performances undeniably shaky, Cash utterly owns the material, exuding such a commanding gravitas and powerful sense of soul that the album works in spite of its faults. As is true of all the American Recordings, Rubin's production is stark. The focus is on Cash's ravaged, straining, world-weary voice: Like that of Billie Holiday on 1958's *Lady in Satin*, or Marianne Faithfull on 1979's *Broken English*, it conveys more in its shattered diminishment than most singers can conjure in their prime.

For better and worse, the mythmaking proceeds apace. Rubin and Cash carefully culled the American Recordings material, and on both *A Hundred Highways* and *Ain't No Grave* Cash's meticulously constructed persona is very much in place. The songs are both intensely personal and universally emblematic of Man Facing Death, and Cash throws himself into the fray with as much vigor as his failing health allows. This is a man who once famously greeted a pushy photographer at San Quentin with an insolent middle finger, and the title track, kicking off the album with its defiant chorus, is the equivalent greeting for encroaching death.

There are wistful farewells to beloved friends (renditions of Kris Kristofferson's "For the Good Times" and Tom Paxton's "Can't Help But Wonder Where I'm Bound"). There is the evocation of a life well lived and the reassurance of a better life to come (J.H. Red Hayes and Jack Rhodes' "Satisfied Mind," Don Robertson and Jack Rollins' "I Don't Hurt Anymore"). And naturally there is a train song, Sheryl Crow's poignant "Redemption Day." The one original Cash composition, "1 Corinthians 15:55," is a slight little waltz that never quite convinces us death has lost its sting—his voice is too ravaged to pull off such a feat.

While the songs are sometimes slight and the performances undeniably shaky, Cash utterly owns the material, exuding such a commanding gravitas and powerful sense of soul that the album works in spite of its faults.

Grave concludes with a hopeful reading of Ed McCurdy's classic song "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream" and with an impossibly moving cover of "Aloha Oe," a song that is as cloying as any ever written. It calls to mind images of swaying hula girls and Elvis Presley in *Blue Hawaii*, and it shouldn't work. But it does. That's because it's a song informed by intravenous drips and the smell of hospital disinfectant, not by an island paradise. Until we meet again, indeed.

Shuttling between the hospital and the recording studio, Cash found a way to redeem even the most maudlin material. The result is the capstone building block of Rubin's iconic monument to Cash, a larger-than-life musician who remained poignantly, thrillingly human until the very end.

7.2

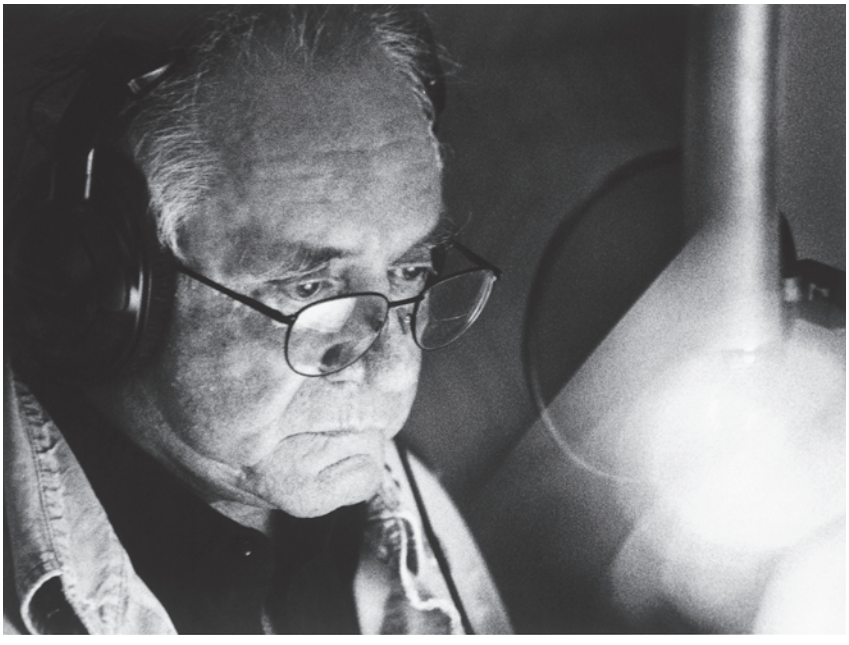


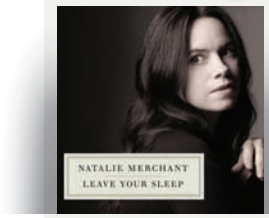
Photo by Martyn Atkins

NATALIE MERCHANT

Leave Your Sleep
NONESUCH
A self-surpassing milestone

Natalie Merchant is just talented enough to escape her own trap. On her new album, she's taken poems by everyone from Jack Prelutsky to Robert Louis Stevenson and crammed them into 26 tracks of museum-piece jazz, Starbucks bluegrass and PBS reggae. It's an effortlessly elegant and pleasant ride that even the obvious hip-yuppie trappings of it all can't obscure. Merchant takes her time between projects, and you forget how deeply wired every inflection of this woman's voice is in your head; her best work has always been tinged with whimsy, and here she lets the colors run amok with a childlike confidence. Fans of the more sinewy *Tigerlily* will be floored to discover that something so theoretically precious may well be her best work since 10,000 Maniacs. **7.7**

JEFF LEVEN



JOANNA NEWSOM

Have One On Me DRAG CITY
A panoramic dreamworld

It's still too early for grand pronouncements about 2010, but what the hell, let's get saucy: Joanna Newsom's *Have One On Me* is the finest two-hour, harp-driven, three-disc opus of the year.

Newsom—still your best possible icebreaker at a dinner party of hipsters, Renaissance Fair staffers and woodland creatures—released her last solo record, *Ys*, in 2006 to a response that ranged from gleaming to marry-me-I'm-begging-you. But if that sophomore album was a vivid glimpse into her weird little world, this sprawling sequel, conceived in flagrant defiance of conventional logic, is legitimately bananas. It's like tumbling into her world and getting lost for weeks.

Devotees will thrill to Newsom (who produced the record, with Jim O'Rourke intermittently mixing) emptying her quiver of tricks here, and the results are indeed glittering. The title track is a serpentine fairy tale of harp, mandolin, piano and other elfin instruments. A jaunty piano opens the fantastically titled "Good Intentions Paving Company," which briefly spirals off into diner pop. "On A Good Day"—at 1:48 long, an oyster cracker to the feast—is a near-perfect heartbreaker ("I saw a life and I called it mine / I saw it drawn so sweet and fine / And I had begun to fill in all the lines / Right down to what we'd name her"). "Soft As Chalk" erupts into a vaguely macabre production that would delight Tom Waits. Best of all is gossamer showstopper "Baby Birch," which will shut down your world for nine and a half minutes.

The album is not for the fainthearted. It's also not for anyone with a tendency to bristle at resolute self-indulgence. The uninitiated may wish for a shift in pace or room temperature ("Does this CD have any fast songs on it?" my son asked), and Newsom's slippery voice remains all but impossible to grasp. But over the course of the album, a weird thing happens: Her flutters and flourishes become comfortable, even at their saddest, and her babygirl voice takes on a grand assuredness. It's difficult to imagine another situation in which plinking pixie sounds, recurrent madrigal noises and radiant folk poetry could be categorically described as honking huge, but for all its girth, *Have One On Me* is packed with magic. **8.5**

JEFF VRABEL

Photo by Annabel Mehran

NO ORDINARY LOVE

Sade Adu battles her heart on band's sixth album

BY STEPHEN M. DEUSNER

SADE
Soldier of Love
EPIC

It's been a decade since R&B mainstay Sade—the band fronted by namesake Sade Adu—dropped its last album, *Lovers Rock*, and before that the band took eight years off between releases. In pop time, that's several generations. The lengthy interval hasn't dampened the group's appeal; it's made it seem even more mysterious and alluring. If the band was more prolific, the music might be more mundane, and the spell would be broken.

The first single from the new album sounded completely fresh when it was released last year. Instead of the smooth, soul-jazz that informed the band's music since Adu first purred "Your Love Is King" in 1984, "Soldier of Love" sounded simultaneously new and old: It marched to a futuristic martial beat and alluded with playful subtlety to first-gen rapper Kool Moe Dee. As Adu sang about the "wild wild west" and the "hinterland of my devotion," the band almost sounded more like Portishead than Portishead, like they were daring you to call them sonic wallpaper.

"Soldier of Love" promised a new sound from Sade, and the album doesn't disappoint. It's the band's most musically adventurous collection to date, and also its most expansive and rewarding. The familiar elements remain, including Adu's timeless voice. They've plied a unique blend of jazz, world, pop and soul for more than a quarter-century, and now they add heavier beats, craftier production and a wider arsenal of sounds and styles.

These are crafty, seductive, thoughtfully constructed songs. "The Safest Place" is bookended by dramatic feedback, while "Morning Bird" opens with a simple, lovely piano theme that uses sustain pedals to create a natural reverb. "Bring Me Home" also opens softly, but is pushed along by a double-time beat that won't let the band admire its own reflection. The upbeat "Babyfather" deploys a hooky bossa-nova beat, pointillist guitar, soft horns and what sounds like a chorus of children, the contrasting elements preventing this tale of parental devotion from weighing down in sentimentality. It's obvious that a lot of work and forethought went into the album's 10 tracks, but it doesn't sound like the group spent the last decade fussing over them.

> Something tragic seems to have happened in the Sadeverse since *Lovers Rock*, and this album depicts a fallout and tentative recovery.

Soldier of Love is Sade's most musically ambitious album, and it's also its most forlorn, its most heartbroken—something tragic seems to have happened in the Sadeverse since *Lovers Rock*, and this album depicts a fallout and tentative recovery. An intense melancholy pervades these songs, even more so than on other Sade albums. Sade albums have never been boisterous affairs, but an unusually intense melancholy pervades these songs. This is Adu at her most luxuriantly depressive, and through it all, she battles her own emotions: "There is something that you need to know," she sings on "Long Hard Road," "it's gonna be alright."

Then again, maybe not. "In another time your tears won't leave a trace, in another time, girl, in another place," she sings on "In Another Time," and it's unclear whether that realization is a great comfort or a great tragedy: "You'll be surprised ... someday I'll mean nothing to you." This is an album that doesn't even believe its own consolations, but that constant skirmish between hope and despair gives these songs battle-worn power.

8.2

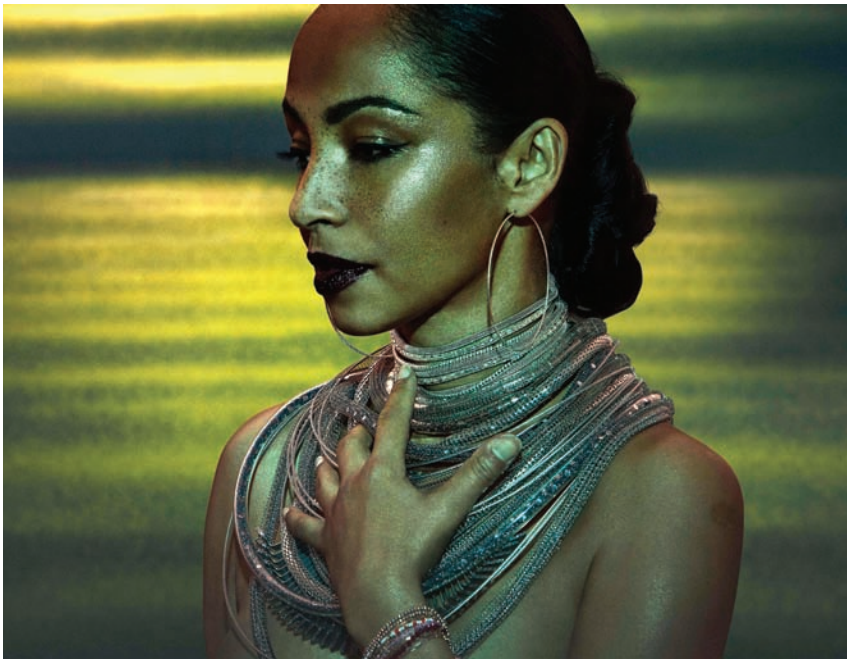


Photo by Sophie Mueller

LITTLE BOOTS

Hands

ELEKTRA

Boot it to the curb

British electro-popper Little Boots' full-length U.S. debut, *Hands*, falls flat, but it's not for lack of trying. On paper, so much about it seems promising: There's a collaboration with Lady Gaga producer RedOne ("Remedy"); a duet with Human League vocalist Philip Oakey ("Symmetry"), a sly nod to Boots' obvious New Wave influences; even a clever song inspired by a Sylvia Plath poem ("Mathematics"), for the literary types. Alas, the best laid plans of musicians and producers can still add up to a boring album. Little Boots' problem may be that there's little left to add to her genre: The synth-pop revival has nearly exhausted itself, and Hands ends up sounding like a B-sides collection cherry-picked from the catalogs of Kylie Minogue and Girls Aloud. Technically, the album was made in a bygone decade—most of the work was done in 2008—and it's a sad sign of the times that it already feels so dated. **4.2**

ALEXANDRIA SYMONDS

BROKEN BELLS

Broken Bells

COLUMBIA

Nothing to fix

The new collaboration between Shins frontman James Mercer and Brian Burton (aka Danger Mouse) is a slow grower. In their inimitable ways, the singer and the wandering beatsmith have always hit for average rather than power, which isn't to say they don't knock it out of the park every so often—see The Shins' "New Slang" and Gnarls Barkley's "Crazy," two of the last decade's most resonant hits. Still, languid is their natural pace. And as Broken Bells (a full-fledged band, both men insist, and not just a one-off team-up), there are times when they seem to have recorded from twin Barcaloungers.

This isn't a bad thing—that instant comfort is the reason these dudes have such devoted followings. And it turns out that Mercer and Burton are compatible in other ways, both fond of slowly unspooling melodies, mellow rhythms and sonic gewgaws that let you come to them. Like his '90s counterpart Dan the Automator, the Danger Mouse of Broken Bells' self-titled debut makes tracks that are mildly woozy—"The High Road" and "Your Head Is on Fire" (their '70s analog synths bemusedly wowing away); "Mongrel Heart," with its spaghetti-Western bridge and dusty-plains horns, high-noon strings and twangy guitar—but never disorienting, colorful without veering totally into the psychedelic.

Mercer's vocals sound looser than usual against these careful backgrounds, whether leading a falsetto chorus on "The Ghost Inside" or alternating between pinched filter and husky chorus on "Sailing to Nowhere." Despite the scrappy rhythm guitar of album closer "The Mall & Misery," this project rarely resembles a rock band. It does, however, really feel like a group. **7.0**

MICHAELANGELO MATOS

UNCUT, UNPOLISHED

A future legend's raw, heart-wrenching first solo sessions

BY STEVE LABATE

VAN MORRISON

T.B. Sheets

FRIDAY MUSIC

The sound of a sick room. Of terminal bed sheets sticky with cold sweat and sputum. The seemingly endless waiting, tambourine ticking off minute after monotonous minute. There's an eerie inevitably to the groove of "T.B. Sheets," the titular nine-and-a-half-minute psychedelic R&B opus at the center of this 1974 Van Morrison compilation (recently reissued by the preservation-minded Friday Music in its original form, with no extras to cloud the proceedings).

For such a heavy, personal song, it isn't sad or angry or scared like you might expect, which makes it even more gripping—and disturbing. There's a numbness to the whole thing, an obsession with minutiae in the face of a hulking truth too painful and frightening to confront. As Morrison narrates this true story about a girl with whom he once lived, he takes a magnifying glass to mundane details, grasping at distraction, trying desperately to sidestep the creeping Conradian terror—*the horror*—of experiencing firsthand our fleeting, fragile mortal existence.

"T.B. Sheets" is one of the most real songs about death you'll ever hear. As life saps steadily from the singer's beloved, tuberculosis-ridden Julie, there is no trite drama, no nostalgic sugar coating or grand deathbed epiphany, but rather an "Is That All There Is?" fatalism—a mild, detached, slowly-suffocating bleakness. "The sunlight shining through the crack in the window pane numbs my brain," Morrison moans over a skittering Hammond organ.

What makes this track so moving and powerful—beyond its stark, unapologetic realism—is Morrison's unflinching courage to deliver a story that spotlights a moment of such unabashed selfishness: While this girl is dying in front of his eyes, he actually has the nerve to snivel about his own problems, whining, in so many words, *What about me? This is hard for me, too*. Of course, this reminds us that we're only human—even the selfless have their breaking points. It's no surprise that Morrison fell apart after recording "T.B. Sheets," so distraught after revisiting that dark place that he cancelled the remaining sessions.

This emotional title track and the seven other cuts collected here—including the original 45-rpm version of Morrison's biggest hit, "Brown Eyed Girl"—were recorded in New York in 1967 for producer Bert Berns' Atlantic imprint, Bang Records. They are songs of innocence and experience—the raw, unpaved bridge between young Morrison's stint fronting Irish garage-rock outfit Them and his acclaimed solo career. These tunes have been released together in several different forms over the years, five of them originally appearing on Morrison's 1967 debut *Blowin' Your Mind*, and all of them appearing on the more comprehensive 1991 *Bang Masters* compilation.

But it hardly matters how the music from these sessions is packaged. No matter which set you choose, the blaring lead guitar whirls, dervish-style, sparring with Van's soul-drunk slur. Tiny-but-constant fuzz-guitar licks weave around strands of shimmering organ like a garland—the Stratocaster noodling of the gods, bursting broken, slinky and blown-out, as if from a cracked speaker cone the size of a crumpled cigarette pack. Smoke 'em if you got 'em, Van, one at a time, chasing long slow gulps of neat whiskey as a candle burns down to black. The saloon piano chimes and the six string warbles with each whir of the Leslie speaker, and every rotation of that vinyl disc is a world turning on its axis, locked in a tight spiral, a pirouette of humanity. Loose-lipped and languid, Van shouts down angels from their clouds, the syllables barely formed on his quivering tongue. Smoke rings drift, glasses clink and bodies brush against each other in the muggy night, all pheromone-drunk swagger and swaying innuendo.

With Van, it's not so much the words that matter. Not that they're bad; Morrison is actually a lightning-rod poet. Still, he knows words are full of shit, and that—when you've got a voice like his—it's more the way you sing 'em that matters. He yelps and howls like a dying man, a possessed shaman, a lovestruck lunatic, smug even in the slippery shadow of discontent. Nothing's gonna end prettily, but he won't let on that he knows—even though he knows all too well.

These are songs of innocence and experience—the raw, unpaved bridge between young Morrison's stint fronting Irish garage-rock outfit Them and his acclaimed solo career.

His vague, wandering lines, blazing with urgency and passion, do more to capture our inability to communicate than anything we could say. Snatches of impressionistic poetry are shaken in a hat with screams, grunts and other onomatopoeias imbued with more meaning than most singers can wring from their easier-to-understand (if less-inspired) couplets.

When Morrison recorded these songs, he was still growing as an artist, and was not yet capable of the refined statement he made the following year with artistic breakthrough *Astral Weeks* (which features more fully formed, carefully arranged and somber acoustic versions of "Beside You" and "Madame George"). But if that masterpiece is a diamond, *T.B. Sheets* is a handful of uncut, unpolished stones, bursting with potential. **9.2**

STEVE LABATE IS A *PASTE* SENIOR CONTRIBUTING WRITER.

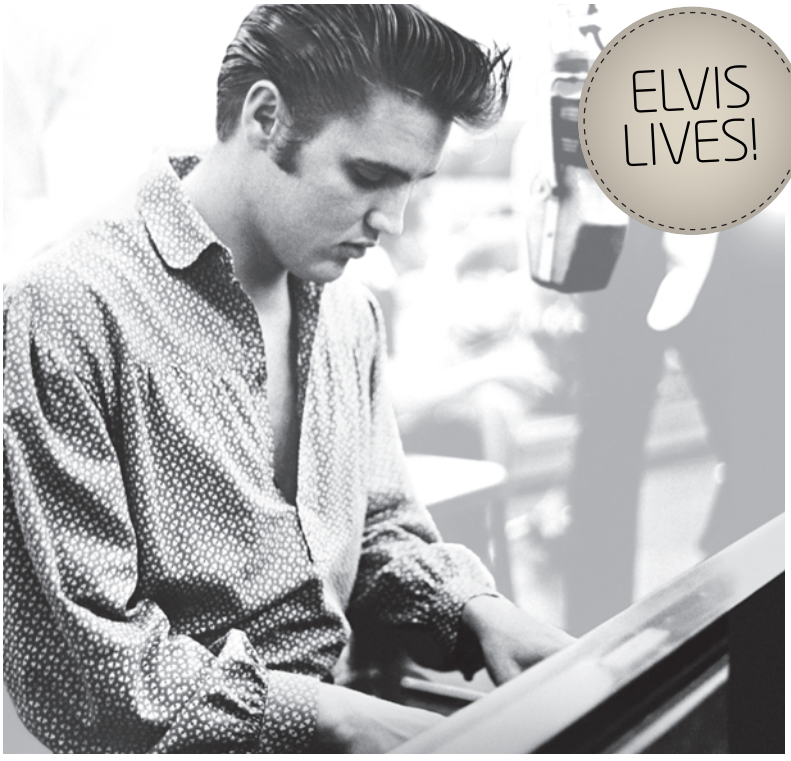
ELVIS PRESLEY

Elvis 75: Good Rockin' Tonight

RCA LEGACY

A fresh survey of rock royalty

The King of Rock 'n' Roll's 75th birthday (which RCA Legacy plans to celebrate all year long) starts modestly with this four-disc box set. But don't let the humble, sepia-toned cover design fool you: The 100 tracks within fully showcase Presley's meteoric rise from the Lauderdale Courts housing projects to the gilded gates of Graceland. *Elvis 75* opens with the tremulous "My Happiness" (Elvis' introduction to Sam Phillips, Sun Studio's resident genius) and later segues into the familiar salvos of "That's All Right" and "Suspicious Minds." Think of Presley as the ancestral American Idol, and Phillips as a gentler—yet no less maniacal—Simon Cowell. It was Phillips who paired that quavering voice with guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black, and diverted the course of history. *Elvis 75* charts every high point, from Memphis to Nashville to Hollywood and back again, with originality and vitality flowing from every note. **ANDRIA LISLE** **8.9**



ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE ATTRACTIONS

Live at Hollywood High

HIP-O

Classic, but unessential

Live at Hollywood High originally appeared as a three-song EP accompanying Elvis Costello's 1979 album *Armed Forces*. It's expanded here to include the 20 songs that comprised the full concert, and filled out with a batch of previously unreleased tracks. The resulting album careens from great song to great song, most derived from Costello's first two classics *My Aim Is True* and *This Year's Model*. Is it essential? Not quite, particularly if you already own the oft-bootlegged *Live At The El Mocambo*, a slightly better early concert recording finally released officially last year. The set list and performance isn't much different on *Hollywood High*, though the stripped-down version of "Accidents Will Happen" is a nice touch. But every serious rock 'n' roll fan needs to own at least one slice of live Costello in his Angry Young Man prime, so take your pick. If you don't already own *Live At The El Mocambo*, this one will do nicely. **ANDY WHITMAN** **7.5**

HARVEY MILK

Harvey Milk

HYDRA HEAD

Return of a lost sludgepunk opus

Among doom-metal bands, Harvey Milk is Squirrel Bait, the undersung journeymen revered by their peers and overlooked by the scene's Sunday drivers. They were the first and scruffiest in an indie-metal lane now densely populated with enlightened plodders like Isis, Pelican, Torche and Kylesa. After breaking up in 1998 and reuniting in 2006, the band's early years as mutant noisemakers in R.E.M.-era Athens were obscured, at least until now. Hydra Head's thoughtful rediscovery of the famed 1994 Bob Weston Sessions (Shellac were notable tourmates) finds the band in crackling primitive form. While this early work lacks the sheer violent width of the band's more accomplished cousins The Melvins, its experimental energy is hard to miss, particularly on crushing excursions like the aptly named "Anthem." **JEFF LEVEN** **7.1**

SMALL BANG

Few fireworks, but a grand finale

BY STEPHEN M. DEUSNER

THE EXPLODING GIRL

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 12

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Bradley Rust Gray
STARRING: Zoe Kazan, Mark Rendall
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Eric Lin
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Oscilloscope, 79 mins.

Bradley Rust Gray's low-key second film, about an epileptic college student on break in New York City, offers no grand moments or spectacular explosions. Instead, *The Exploding Girl* is an ambitiously life-size coming-of-age story, striving for a moody, post-adolescent realism constructed of small events and improvised chatter—and it's this everyday scope that makes the movie both charming and frustrating.

Zoe Kazan, recently of *It's Complicated* and *The Private Life of Pippa Lee*, plays title character Ivy, whose retro sundresses and gangly grace make her onscreen presence magnetic. Ivy has come home to New York with her friend Al (Mark Rendall, a ringer for Jeff Buckley). They hang out, both together and alone, a lot—at parties, on street corners, on rooftops, in doctor's offices, in parks, at pizzerias—and he has a crush that's obvious to everyone but Ivy.

Very little else happens in this movie, which is intentional—this is mumblecore, after all—and there are only crumbs of plot. The biggest advancement stems from a series of phone calls with Ivy's college boyfriend, who grows increasingly distant with each pained conversation. Again, she's is oblivious to the facts that are obvious to everyone else: her boyfriend is gradually detaching, and the start of the relationship for her was only a casual hook-up for him. We never see him, which only emphasizes the distance between them, and these halting conversations, though painful to watch, further endear Ivy to the audience.

At times this lack of activity threatens to stifle *The Exploding Girl* and render its characters inert, and Gray's direction—which strives for handheld verité—too often comes across as stilted. The camera can be an eccentric, annoying presence, as cinematographer Eric Lin relies heavily on long, poorly framed shots that scream realism yet are actually as mannered as any hyper-edited action flick.

And yet, the last scene is such a beautiful denouement to this non-story, so patient and vivid and sweet, that it transforms everything that comes before it. This is exactly what Gray and his crew are striving for: a subtle, poetic shot that renders the mundane into something truly monumental. It's *not* explosive, and that's the whole point. **7.0**

STEPHEN M. DEUSNER IS A LONGTIME *PASTE* CONTRIBUTOR BASED IN NEW YORK CITY.

Photo courtesy of Oscilloscope

VINCERE

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 19

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Marco Bellocchio
STARRING: Giovanna Mezzogiorno, Filippo Timi
CINEMATOGRAPHY: Daniele Ciprì
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Offside, 128 mins.

So I married a fascist dictator

In its first act, *Vincere* is as an over-edited biopic about the rise of fire-bellowing orator Benito Mussolini. As the future dictator moves from broke rabblerouser to fascistic rhetorician, he marries Ida Dalser, who gives birth to their son. But as Mussolini's ascent quickens, director Marco Bellocchio inverts all expectations and the film instead follows the downward trajectory of the scorned Dalser. A little-known footnote of history, she was discredited and locked in an insane asylum by Italy's fascist forces, her son mocked and left to die in an institution. Bellocchio began investigating the dysfunctional Italian family with his audacious 1965 debut *Fists in the Pocket*, but here he goes further, implicating cinema itself. In *Vincere*, we behold the medium shifting from entertainment to propaganda tool, the character of Mussolini replaced by a demigod image projected on the screen for the enraptured audience. **ANDY BETA** 8.2

Vincere photo by Daniele Musso

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City Island photo by Phil Caruso

CITY ISLAND

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 26

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Raymond De Felitta
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Vanja Cernjul
STARRING: Andy Garcia, Alan Arkin, Julianna Margulies, Emily Mortimer, Steven Strait
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Anchor Bay Films, 103 mins.

Functional dysfunction

The Rizzos have problems. Patriarch Vince (played by a nuanced Andy Garcia) and his family aren't talking to each other, and it's clear things have been headed downhill for a while. The reappearance of Vince's illegitimate son works as a sufficient catalyst to slowly bring the truth out of everyone, which leads to a satisfying if overly-determined conclusion. Dysfunctional-family movies are more prevalent than comic book adaptations these days, but what recommends *City Island* over similar films is writer/director Raymond De Felitta's casual, affectionate sense of humor, which never feels punched up for laughs. But aside from this, *City Island* offers few surprises and is content to leave audiences with a tidy, unquestioning view of traditional family values. **SEAN GANDERT** 5.3

WHO DO YOU LOVE?

RELEASE DATE: APRIL 9

DIRECTOR: Jerry Zaks
WRITERS: Peter Martin Wormann, Robert Conte
CINEMATOGRAPHER: David Franco
STARRING: Alessandro Nivola, David Oyelowo, Chi McBride, Jon Abrahams
STUDIO/RUN TIME: IFC, 91 mins.

Chess Records story has the blues

Jerry Zaks' *Who Do You Love?* is the most recent biopic to fall victim to the form's ironic limitations—any life worth making a movie about is far too vast to condense into a two-hour film, making shortcuts necessary. With rushed plot developments and tired emotional touchstones, once again we are left with more of a slideshow than a movie. The story of Chess Records founder Leonard Chess—a Jewish man who introduced the world to artists like Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon and Bo Diddley—is fascinating. Alessandro Nivola turns in a solid performance as the passionate but haunted Chess, David Oyelowo is charming and charismatic as Muddy Waters, and there are a few joy-of-making-music scenes that'll bring a smile to fans' faces. But ultimately the movie is too shallow to leave much of a lasting impact. **MICHAEL DUNAWAY** 6.1

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 19

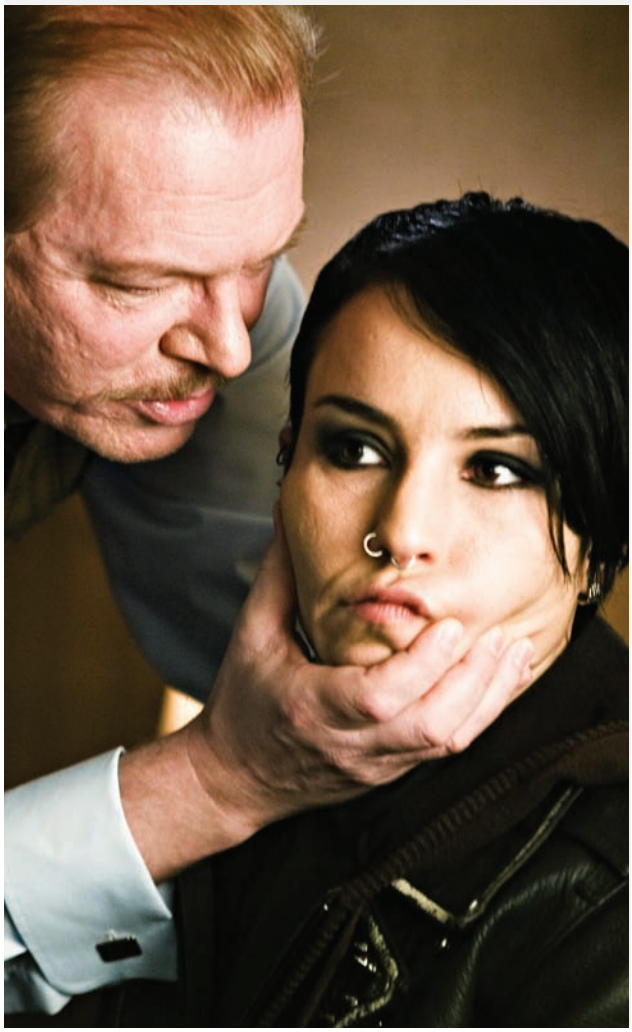
DIRECTOR:
Niels Arden Oplev
WRITERS: Nikolaj Arcel and Rasmus Heisterberg (screenplay), Stieg Larsson (novel)
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Jens Fischer and Eric Kress
STARRING: Michael Nyqvist, Noomi Rapace, Lena Endre, Peter Haber
STUDIO/RUN TIME:
Music Box Films, 152 mins.

Noir sees the light

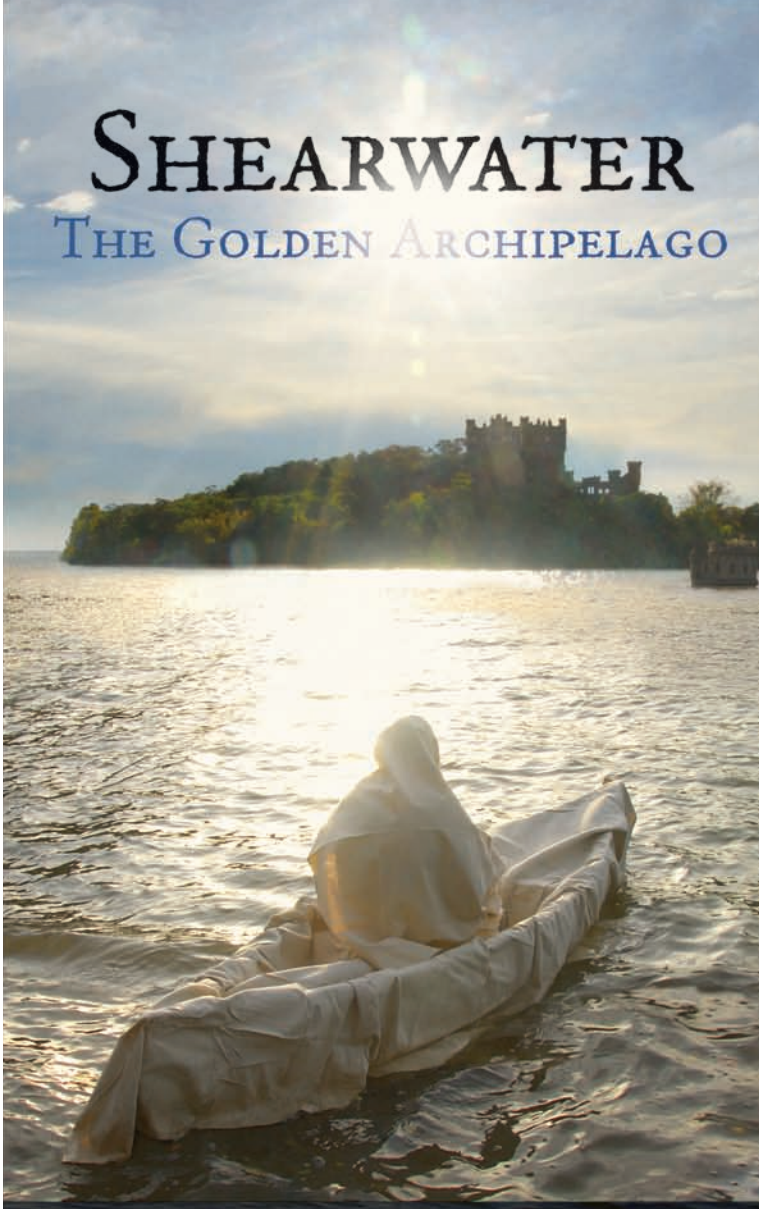
This fittingly Swedish adaptation of Stieg Larsson's posthumous Millenium Trilogy introduces us to Mikael Blomkvist, a disgraced journalist hired by a wealthy former industrialist to solve the murder of his great niece, a case that went cold 40 years ago.

Blomkvist is assisted by hacker/investigator Lisbeth Salander, whose history of abuse adds weight to what turns out to be more than an isolated murder. Director Niels Oplev draws from the noir tradition, but only to rip apart conventions in a movie less about investigation than about exposing the widespread misogyny and racism corrupting Swedish society. Unfortunately, this goal is undermined by the onscreen portrayals of extreme violence against women, though movie's explicit nature is in some respects an attempt at honesty. Although *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* doesn't overcome all of its genre's clichés (particularly in the unnecessary romance between its leads) it still shakes off most of the cobwebs that have for years been creeping into detective films. **SEAN GANDERT**

7.1



The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo photo courtesy of Music Box Films



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PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Curious, all-encompassing minimalists celebrate 10th anniversary by traversing Canadian countryside

BY STEVE LABATE

THE WHITE STRIPES

Under Great White Northern Lights

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 16

DIRECTOR: Emmett Malloy
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Warner Bros., 92 mins.

Whenever Jack and Meg White make music in *Under Great White Northern Lights* (the new documentary about their 2007 Canadian tour), they're a peppermint swirl of electricity—the culmination of decades of greasy blues and DIY punk; the American garage writ large. They're the heirs apparent to everyone from Ledbelly to Bill Monroe to John Lee Hooker to the MC5, Led Zeppelin, the Flat Duo Jets and Nirvana.

Moreso than countless slick modern bluesmen, newgrass-picking hippie bands and rootsy singer/songwriters pretending the last 40 years never happened, The White Stripes have synthesized the canon of traditional American music into something fresh and relevant. Others revisit the past through simple nostalgia, but when Jack and Meg play together, they step through a portal into some ancient juke joint, revival tent or concert hall, grab our musical history by the sleeve and drag it kicking and screaming into the present.

The duo's chops are in stark contrast with their highly stylized image. The Whites realized early on that every non-musical decision they've made—from the mythmaking of their brother/sister gag to the eye-catching presence of their sharply dressed road crew in *Northern Lights*—was an artistic choice that could add to the overall experience. In one of this doc's numerous and revealing interview segments, Jack makes an important clarification: "The biggest misconception ... [is that] every single thing about The White Stripes is premeditated. Our stage setup and the way we present ourselves and dress is premeditated, but it's pretty much something that was premeditated 10 years ago. ... When it comes to the music, that's not premeditated at all. The music is really completely in charge of us."

The band's explosive performances in *Northern Lights* (from the inspired "Black Math" to the jammed-out "I'm Slowly Turning Into You," and the epic cover of Dolly Parton's "Jolene") make it difficult to argue the contrary. Jack and Meg careen from riff to riff, idea to idea, clinging for dear life as they dig their spurs into the mythical rodeo beast of rock 'n' roll. Their lean guitar-and-drums approach allows them to turn on a dime, following any stormy muse they please.

> Jack and Meg careen from riff to riff, idea to idea, clinging for dear life as they dig their spurs into the mythical rodeo beast of rock 'n' roll.

Both members of this stripped-down twosome have been chastised for their lack of musical ability, which is rather comical considering how much the Stripes' frontman channels the same '70s guitarists critics once maligned for being *too* good. And while Meg is no Neil Peart, her attack is big and booming, and it fits. Her sound—a blank canvas as porcelain-pure as her skin—is as much a part of The White Stripes' sound as Jack's tortured wails and squealing guitar feedback.

After a brief marriage and 10 years as touring bandmates, they have an unspoken understanding—picking up each other's cues and inside jokes. They share moments in *Northern Lights* where the world past the end of the stage may as well not exist.

Offstage, though, they engage with that outside world. Instead of holing up in hotels and shuffling from arena to arena, they're out connecting with the communities they're touring through. They trade songs with Inuit elders, throw spontaneous free shows at pool halls, a YMCA camp and a bowling alley in Saskatoon, and pop up on a fishing boat to play Muddy Waters' "Catsfish Blues." Their love of what they do—their desire to share their music in such a forthright way—is as admirable as their discography.

9.1

Photo by Autumn De Wilde

➥ STEVE LABATE IS A *PASTE* SENIOR CONTRIBUTING WRITER.

PONYO

AVAILABLE NOW

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Hayao Miyazaki
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Atsushi Okui
STARRING: Noah Cyrus, Cate Blanchett, Tina Fey, Matt Damon, Frankie Jonas
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Walt Disney, 100 mins.

Go fish

It's impossible to watch Hayao Miyazaki's *Ponyo* without drawing a comparison to *The Little Mermaid*–here too, the titular character is a fish-person who becomes a human and must find true love. But Miyazaki's take is more personal and whimsical. There's an irresistible passion in every frame, regardless of whether the events on screen make any sense.

Beyond its inciting incident (titular fish Ponyo decides that she wants to become human, which for poorly-explained reasons sets off a flood) the movie doesn't have much of a plot and certainly no real antagonists. The rest of the film hinges on Ponyo and her young love, Sosuke, reuniting with his mother. Even as he ages, Miyazaki's young characters remain accurate portraits of childhood without being reduced to mere nostalgia. No one understands the wonders of youth better. *Ponyo*'s unhurried, fantastical journey might not seem like compelling cinema, but sometimes it's enough to just sit back and let a beautiful work of animation wash over you, troubles sliding past as the pictures transport you into another world.

8.5

SEAN GANDERT

THE PRIVATE LIVES OF PIPPA LEE

AVAILABLE NOW

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Rebecca Miller
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Declan Quinn
STARRING: Alan Arkin, Robin Wright Penn, Winona Ryder, Keanu Reeves, Maria Bello, Blake Lively
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Screen Media Films, 98 mins.

Girl gone mild

In *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee*, Rebecca Miller adapts her novel of the same name, telling again the melodramatic story of its title character. Lee and her husband's relationship has slowly fallen apart, and Miller takes us back in time to show what led to this loveless marriage with a much older man. A bifurcated plotline attempts to contrast the dullness of Lee's current middle-class existence with what she once was—a runaway, a light S&M porn actress turned dancer/drug addict. The story is somewhat fascinating, but suffers from a *Forrest Gump*-like tendency to reduce life to a series of highs and lows. Its schizophrenic form does more than just link with Lee's psychological state; it also emphasizes the dullness of her current existence, in which there's a lot of sitting around tables and arguing in a way sadly reminiscent of a Lifetime movie. This isn't helped by the many two-dimensional characters and frequently dire acting (not all of it by Keanu Reeves). Miller is no Ingmar Bergman or Woody Allen, and her attempts to turn Lee's story into high drama fall flat.

3.9

SEAN GANDERT

PINK SLIP BLUES

The only thing worse than working is not working

BY NICK MARINO

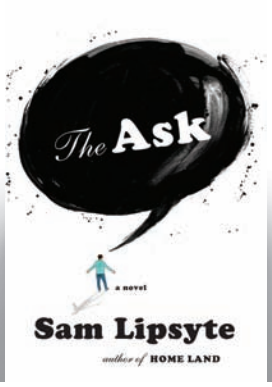
SAM LIPSYTE

The Ask

[FICTION] FARAR, STRAUSS AND GIROUX

Schlubby development officer Milo Burke is fired from his university job after telling "an arrogant, talentless, daddy-damaged waif" of an art student where she can stick her paintbrush. Thrust headlong into a mid-life crisis, Milo thus embarks on a tragicomic odyssey to restore his employment status, rebuild his crumbling marriage and retain the few remaining shreds of his vanishing dignity.

The quest won't be easy. Milo possesses abundant talent as an artist and wordsmith, but little ambition beyond the primal desire for a screw. He drifts around the boroughs of New York, torn between bourgeois comfort and bohemian dreams. He feels a vague paternalistic obligation toward his family, but mostly finds his wife and kid bothersome. He's smart, funny, misanthropic and unemployable—every liberal-arts graduate's nightmare scenario come true, a latter-day, recession-era Ignatius J. Reilly.



He's also the hero of Sam Lipsyte's amusing, occasionally frustrating new novel, *The Ask*, a book that probes the anxieties of the modern middle-aged man—a creature wracked with just enough guilt over his inadequacies to get off his ass and do something about them, though he begrudges the effort.

What Milo decides to do borders on DeLillo-esque absurdity: In an attempt to regain his old job, he endeavors to extract a donation from candy-addicted plutocrat Purdy Stuart, who in turn uses Milo as a manservant/intermediary between himself and his estranged, legless son, Don (who has the war in Iraq to thank for his amputation). Don and Purdy's scenes feel less like the rest of the book's seamless prose, and more like stilted set pieces—it's as though *A Confederacy of Dunces* has suddenly shifted to *White Noise*, and your enjoyment of the book's third act will depend on whether you interpret that as a compliment.

The Ask's considerable charms lie in Milo's hilarious internal monologues and hapless interactions with just about every other character. He maintains a poorly disguised lust for his boss, Vargina (yes, Vargina), culminating in a droll moment that finds erotic potential in egg salad. He finds himself alternately charmed and baffled by his young son Bernie, who asks such disquieting questions as, "What's depressive?" and "What's a pansy?" and "Do superheroes have foreskins?" Milo also endures a coarse acquaintance named Nick, who pops up to unveil the premise for *Dead Man Dining*, a reality show about prisoners' last meals. And he has a love/hate relationship with his co-worker Horace, who lives in a massive space subdivided by cages. "Kids moved to the city," Milo observes, "but there were no apartments left to rent to them, or none they could afford. But on a starting salary, or no salary, you could maybe manage a cage."

Here, then, is the book's beating heart. *The Ask* courses with an undercurrent of existential dread that feels acutely modern and unlikely to subside anytime soon.

The premise may be hyperbolic, but the threat is real—Milo can feel on his neck the hot breath of a younger generation. "I lost out to kids who lived on hummus and a misapprehension of history," Milo says of his inability to find a new job. "Besides, there really wasn't work for anyone. The whole work thing was over." Here, then, is the book's beating heart.

The Ask courses with an undercurrent of existential dread that feels acutely modern and unlikely to subside anytime soon. Bernie's queries may get the laughs, but Milo has some questions of his own: What have I done with my life? What's an acceptable outcome at this point? Why do I even bother? For a comic novel, the central character's predicament is fairly bleak. Milo's questions remain unspoken and unresolved, hanging in the air like dust particles caught in the glint of a setting sun.

7.3

➥ NICK MARINO IS *PASTE*'S MANAGING EDITOR.

Photo © Robert Reynolds

JIMMY MCDONOUGH

Tammy Wynette: Tragic Country Queen

[NON-FICTION]

VIKING

Needs less trees, more forest

For an exhaustive work that obviously required much passion to assemble, *Tragic Country Queen* is a pretty uninspiring read that lacks immediacy and uses heavy quote stacking as a crutch.

Oddly, the lead chapter is the book's weakest, acting as a stumbling block instead of a tractor beam. In this section, it's as if author Jimmy McDonough employed William S. Burroughs' cut-up technique, writing the story and then randomly reassembling it—which works great for a smack-fueled mindbender like *Naked Lunch*, but not so much for a country-music bio.

After the first chapter, the book levels out, shifting to a more appropriate chronological approach, and McDonough does an excellent job uncovering little truths and calling Wynette out on the many self-serving fictions of her own autobiography. But too often *Tragic Country Queen* bogs down in minutiae, blurring our view of Wynette and making it difficult to get at the larger truth of who this surprisingly complex Nashville icon really was. **STEVE LABATE** **3.9**

MARISA MELTZER

Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music

[NON-FICTION]

FABER AND FABER (7.2)

Revolution girl style, then and now

"Am I crazy, or did I make this happen?" Riot grrrl pioneer Tobi Vail poses this question in Marissa Meltzer's new book, wondering if she and her punk-inspired sistren—who shocked and awed with their declarations of "revolution girl style now" in the early 1990s—should be held responsible for the lip-glossed "girl power" craze led by the Spice Girls a few years later.

That question is the thrust of this book, and though Meltzer fails to establish a solid causal link between the two, she does a nice job of tracing the reception and representation of mainstream female musicians (and their sexuality and de facto woman-ness) throughout the '90s.

Still, by the end of the fourth chapter, you get the feeling that even the author is tired of caring about Britney Spears' sexual and professional agency. The real jewels here are the final two sections, in which Meltzer rescues the idea of "girl power" from the feminist-lite ghetto of the late '90s and suggests its power to become something vital and meaningful—more like what the original riot grrrls once envisioned. **RACHAEL MADDUX** **7.2**

Jimmy McDonough photo by Natalia Wisdon

BRAD WATSON

Aliens in the Prime of Their Lives

[FICTION]

NORTON

Deep South stories and getting deeper

Brad Watson may live in Laramie, Wyo. these days, but the Mississippi native remains as Southern as kudzu. With his latest, the prize-winning short-story writer (*Last Days of the Dog-Men*) and National Book Award finalist (*The Heaven of Mercury*) offers 12 new stories mostly set in (or in the spirit of) home state.

Watson has a sly hand with a short story. A piece like table-setter "Vacuum" rattles the giggle box. The title tale lands from outer space, complete with aliens dressed like your Aunt Nette and Uncle Bobby. "Fallen Nellie," the tale of a female corpse, rode hard and put up wet, is uncomfortably memorable.

After notable 2009 collections by Alice Munro, Elizabeth Strout and others, a *Christian Science Monitor* essay recently suggested 2009 was "the year of the short story." *Aliens* shows we're still its age of excellence. **CHARLES MCNAIR** **8.7**

ELIF BATUMAN

The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People Who Read Them

[NON-FICTION]

FARRAR, STRAUSS AND GIROUX

Chekhov is fun again!

Elif Batuman's first book (parts of which appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's* and *n+1*) is at once a travelogue, a grad-school memoir and a history of classic Russian authors. The result? Something like Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* as written by a brilliant, witty, six-foot-tall Turkish-American woman with a Ph.D.

Like Twain, Batuman has a fine ear for dialogue and an eye for strange human behavior. The chapter examining the death of Tolstoy ends with one of Batuman's elderly colleagues soiling his pants on the way to visit Chekhov's estate. "Ladies and gentlemen, I must apologize for the delay," he says. "I am an old man, you see. A very old man."

Though not without skippable moments, *The Possessed* establishes Batuman as one of our sharpest and funniest new nonfiction writers. **BURKE NIXON** **8.3**

SOGGY BRITCHES

Interactive thriller brave, but only periodically thrilling

BY JASON KILLINGSWORTH

HEAVY RAIN

DEVELOPER: QUANTIC DREAM
PUBLISHER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION 3

The videogame industry has been outgrossing Hollywood by a "Jerry Bruckheimer *who?*" kind of margin for years now, but game developers can't seem to stop using motion pictures as benchmarks for their own visual-presentation and storytelling endeavors. We've reached the point that, in game marketing, the word "cinematic" is now used interchangeably with modifiers like "mind-blowing" or "amazing," and not many gamers have bothered to question this. It's true that both games and movies are capable of delivering impressive visuals and compelling yarns, but there are important, fundamental differences.

There's a reason why the auteur behind a film is called a "director." They don't just sit in snazzy folding chairs and blurt out "action" and "cut;" they're micromanagers in the best possible way, orchestrating exactly how audiences will experience a film, down to the most seemingly arbitrary background details. But with games, due to the medium's interactive nature, developers cede huge amounts of control to players in terms of how a game's world and narrative will be

experienced. Player choice in video games presents a unique set of problems for interactive storytellers, but French studio Quantic Dream's latest project, *Heavy Rain*, stares down this challenge with admirable unflappability.

More than any other game to date, *Heavy Rain* positions itself as an interactive movie. A promotional poster goes so far as to list the game's characters in precisely the spot where you'd expect to see names like Julia Roberts or George Clooney, and its cutline reads, "How far are you prepared to go to save someone you love?" The main image is of an origami bird with its pointed paper legs soaked in blood.

Heavy Rain's plot revolves around an investigation into a string of murders by the so-called "Origami Killer." In the vicinity of each victim's corpse, police have discovered a head-scratching calling card—a small, folded-paper animal. Instead of controlling one person the entire game, players alternate between four main characters, depending on the chapter. The archetypal thriller-movie roles are all covered here: grizzled detective, intrepid journalist, bereaved parent and cucumber-cool FBI agent.

From the moment you're confronted with the title screen's lashing rain, it's clear that taut atmosphere will be in ample supply. The game cribs a few notes from P.T. Anderson's *Magnolia* (hands-down, the best movie about inclement weather ever made), opening each chapter with the time and location, but also, when appropriate, the total inches of rainfall. Just like in Anderson's masterpiece, weather functions throughout the game as a barometer of the characters' mental well-being, and while the device may be as subtle as a sledgehammer, it's suitably agitating all the same.

Despite this, the game starts off at a crawl. In the opening chapter, we meet architect Ethan Mars. He's stubbly-faced handsome, wealthy and has a picture-perfect family life—a pretty wife and two well-adjusted sons. Of course the game needs to help us get acquainted with its context-sensitive control scheme, but do we really need to help our protagonist urinate, shower, shave, get dressed and putter downstairs for breakfast? I felt like a first-year nursing student making rounds in an old-folks home.

Still, you begin to develop an oddly potent kind of identification with the characters after you've followed them step-by-step through these ordinary tasks. By peppering the action with moments of unvarnished real life, *Heavy Rain* marks a watershed moment that could forever change how videogame stories engage players. In terms of gameplay, *Heavy Rain*'s closest stylistic cousin is likely an adventure/puzzle Flash game (aka mouse-click everywhere until something happens) like Jakub Dvorsky's critically adored *Samorost* series. *Heavy Rain* eases the frustration by using visual prompts to let you know when you can interact with something in your immediate vicinity, rewarding your exploration in a measured, incremental fashion. The template is imperfect, but it's one worth building on.

By peppering the action with moments of unvarnished real life, *Heavy Rain* marks a watershed moment in gaming.

Just as you start growing complacent, bogged down by Ethan Mars' everyday tedium, the game arrives at its pivotal scene. Soon the recurring dreams—in which Ethan finds himself holding origami figures—will start. The victim corpses will pile higher. Progress feels agonizingly slow at times, but the level of suspense whipped up by *Heavy Rain*'s crime-noir storyline can take some of the credit (or blame, depending on your perspective). If nothing else, *Heavy Rain* deserves major kudos for confronting its characters with emotional dilemmas that go far deeper than whether to kill a mutated Nazi with a laser cannon.

6.2

JASON KILLINGSWORTH IS *PASTE*'S GAMES EDITOR. YOU CAN READ HIS WEEKLY GAMES COLUMN, START PRESS, EACH WEDNESDAY AT PASTEMAGAZINE.COM. HE ALSO WRITES FOR *KILL SCREEN*, CRISPY GAMER AND IRELAND'S *CLICK* MAGAZINE.

Demon's Souls

DEMON'S SOULS

DEVELOPER: FROM SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: ATLUS
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 3

If at first you don't survive...

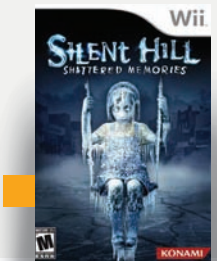
Demon's Souls is an action role-playing game in the same genus as *Fable II*, but more punishing and austere. Swing at the wrong time and your enemy will catch you off balance; overlook the wonky stats and upgrades and you'll never stand a chance in the first place. In return for all this work, the game will never waste your time. Maps are concise and packed with new challenges, and the mechanics work in perfect harmony: Boost the right stat and you'll feel the difference when you need one less swing to win a fight. The echo-y sound design and charred, damned environments are daunting, but when you beat each one, the victory tastes that much sweeter. *Demon's Souls* asks a lot—and deserves nothing less. **CHRIS DAHLEN** 9.5

SILENT HILL: SHATTERED MEMORIES

DEVELOPER: CLIMAX GROUP
PUBLISHER: KONAMI
PLATFORM: NINTENDO WII

More soapy than scary

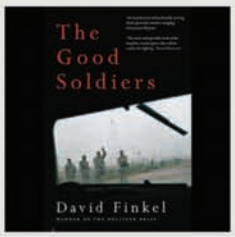
Silent Hill: Shattered Memories touts its psychological profiling of the player, but does it as hamfistedly as possible. You'll take the occasional grade-school psychology exam, administered by a therapist who looks and talks like a soap-opera villain. This melodramatic emphasis on the dark and mysterious dominates the writing and voice acting, spoiling what could've been a good series reboot. The awkward combat and enemies of previous *Silent Hills* are gone, replaced with solving puzzles and running like hell from unbeatable phantoms. Your only tools are a flashlight and a cell phone, both of which make great use of the Wii's unique motion controls. Too bad the story is about as subtle as an episode of *All My Children*. **GARRETT MARTIN** 3.4



PASTE RECOMMENDS @ AUDIBLE.COM

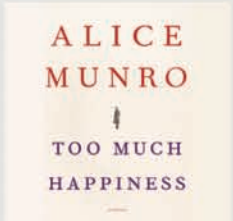
Henderson The Rain King
by Saul Bellow
Narrated by Joe Barrett

The Lacuna
by Barbara Kingsolver
Narrated by Barbara Kingsolver



The Good Soldiers
by David Finkel
Narrated by Mark Boyett

Point Omega
by Don DeLillo
Narrated by Campbell Scott



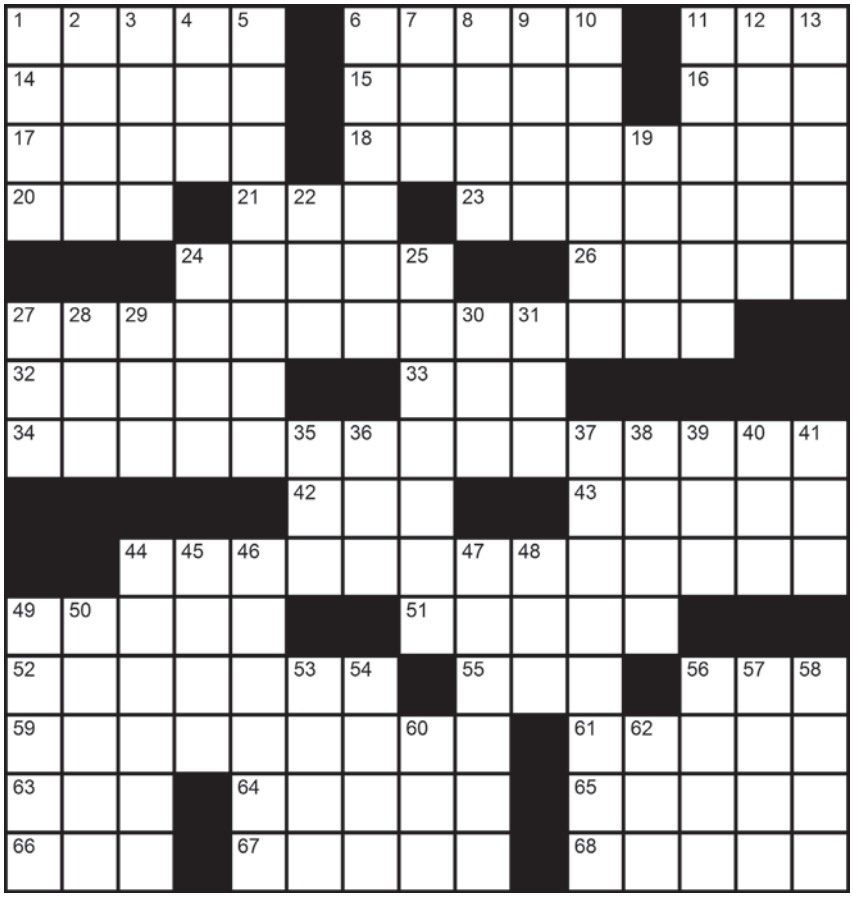
Too Much Happiness
by Alice Munro
Narrated by Kimberly Farr, Arthur Morey

audible.com

CROSSWORD

TAKING DIRECTIONS

BY BRENDAN EMMETT QUIGLEY (BRENDANEMMETTQUIGLEY.COM)



ACROSS

1 Atwitter, with "up"
6 Uncertain
11 Application datum: Abbr.
14 A point ahead
15 Bring to life
16 Part of a giggle
17 À la king?
18 Buttons with the director of *Blue Velvet* on them?
20 The Fiery Furnaces' "Bitter ___"
21 Kid's cry
23 Last song on *OK Computer*, with "The"
24 Daybreaks
26 Acts feeble-minded
27 Blast one has watching *Annie Hall*?
32 Brute
33 Ted who leads the Pharmacists
34 Shortest route to *Almost Famous* director's house?
42 Chat feature from 48-Down
43 Gofers
44 Length of a *Godfather* marathon, perhaps?
49 *Alice in Wonderland* cat
51 Bright hues of '80s outfits
52 Historic town of Connecticut
55 Addition
56 Actress Tyler
59 Lose one's temper during *Slumdog Millionaire*?
61 "Lord, ___?"
63 Charlotte-to-Raleigh dir.
64 Mountain crest
65 Any song in *Rock Band*
66 Cymbals ___ Guitars
67 Put an edge on
68 "I did it!"

DOWN

1 With 58-Down, singer/songwriter with the 2009 album *Childish Prodigy*
2 Blunted blade
3 Eastern discipline
4 *Bambi* character
5 Big name in pineapples
6 Presidential middle name
7 Brown, e.g.
8 (Turn to the next pg.)
9 Bakeware brand
10 Violinist Menuhin
11 Certain Muslim
12 *Stop Making* ___ (Talking Heads concert movie)
13 Crows' homes
19 *Carrie* setting
22 Buenos Aires is its cap.
24 Trucker hat material
25 Biblical king
27 Denver Nuggets' orig. league
28 ___ Savy Fav
29 Back muscle, familiarly
30 Drops on blades
31 "Little piggie"
35 Ceiling
36 ___ *It Off* (2008 Times New Viking album)
37 Dogtooth violet with creamy white flowers
38 "Hogwash!"
39 Chemical ending
40 "A rat!"
41 Leak sound
44 "Despite that ..."
45 *Curtain* ___ (Eminem's greatest hits album)
46 "Dude, killer!"
47 Looked lecherously
48 See 42-Across
49 *Romper Room* role model
50 Massey of "Balalaika"
53 '60s-'70s Italian prime minister Aldo
54 20-20, e.g.
56 Roman historian
57 Any thing
58 See 1-Down
60 When the French fry
62 British ___ Power

BACK ISSUES

NEIL GAIMAN RAINN WILSON
Paste
the BEST of WHAT'S NEXT
MORE THAN 25 MUSICIANS, ARTISTS YOU IGNOR AT YOUR PERIL!
ZACH GALIFIANAKIS

ARCADE FIRE THE RACONTEURS
Paste
MY MORNING JACKET CAN'T BE STOPPED
THE 17 COOLEST RECORD STORES IN AMERICA
Reconsidering UNCLE REMUS

GET THEM BEFORE THEY'RE GONE

PASTEMAGAZINE.COM/STORE

UNGLUED

2 FAUST 2 FURIOUS

BY MICHAEL SABA
ILLUSTRATION BY WESLEY ALLSBROOK

SCRIPT EXCERPTS FROM MICHAEL BAY'S $600 MILLION ADAPTATION OF MARLOWE'S *DR. FAUSTUS.*

Pg. 1 EXT. PENTAGON—Day. CUE: Martial drums. Birds (CGI) take wing from underneath Old Glory (CGI) flapping in the sunlight. This is freedom. This is America.

CUT TO: INT. PENTAGON—E-RING CONFERENCE ROOM. Army Chief of Staff FAUST sits at a table, flanked by generals. Young and handsome, he is the no-nonsense military type.

FAUST: What's the situation here, boys?
GENERAL: It's bad, sir. Real bad.
FAUST: North Korea again? Iran?
GENERAL: Worse. Mephisto is back.

CUT TO: EXT. SKIES ABOVE PAKISTAN—Day. The sleek, sexy F-22 Raptor gleams in the sun as it patrols Central Asia. Another shot of the F-22. Another. God, that is an arousing piece of military hardware.

PILOT: All clear.

Suddenly, the demon MEPHISTO lands on the nose of the jet, his black trenchcoat billowing as he punches through the cockpit. MEPHISTO grabs the PILOT and pulls him face-to-face.

MEPHISTO: Time to *raise some hell.*

CUE: Linkin Park song. MEPHISTO bellows a sinister laugh, flying away as the jet explodes.

CUT TO: TITLE SEQUENCE.

Pg. 29 INT. WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM. FAUST sits across from PRESIDENT CHARLES. There's a strategic map (CGI) on a big screen, like that movie *WarGames*. Shit. Is. Going. Down.

FAUST: You've gotta trust me, sir. I fought Mephisto before, I know how he operates.
CHARLES: I'm afraid not, Faust. The UN Security Council just voted. We're going to negotiate.
FAUST: You're making a deal with the devil! [Looks directly at camera] I know a thing or two about that.
CHARLES: The world needs peacemakers now, not warriors. Your time is over.
SULTRY VOICE: I've got a solution.

The clack of stilettos is heard as the camera cuts to reveal the HOTTEST WOMAN EVER. Slow pan down from her low-cut blouse to her legs, then back. Then down and back again. Camera remains fixed on her chest for the rest of the scene.

CHARLES: Who the hell are you?
H.W.E.: Helena Troi, Mr. President. I'm a researcher at Livermore Labs. I was head of Project Mephisto.
FAUST: The bioengineering genius that created Mephisto at age 17, and nearly destroyed the world.
TROI: Now, gentlemen, if you'll just direct your eyes to these...

CUE: Linkin Park song.

Pg. 83 EXT. Vatican City—Night. FAUST and MEPHISTO stand shirtless on the dome of St. Peter's Basilica. THE POPE is tied up behind MEPHISTO. Explosions and lightning rock the cityscape every few seconds.

MEPHISTO: You've defeated my seven deadly lieutenants. I could use power like yours. Join me... *father.* This is my world now.
FAUST: Not on my watch! You're no son of mine! I'm going to send you back to hell! Where you belong!
MEPHISTO: So be it!

FAUST's giant anthropomorphic robot VALDES rises from the ruins of the city. MEPHISTO's warbot CORNELIUS rises in tandem. They jump into the cockpits. The robots brandish fearsome arsenals of lasers, missiles, cannons, machineguns, railguns, nailguns and glue guns.

BOTH: Id Extender, activate!

Explosions. So many explosions.

CUE: Linkin Park song.

MICHAEL SABA IS A *PASTE* ASSISTANT EDITOR.

PASTE (ISSN 1540-3106) MARCH 2010, ISSUE 61 IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY PASTE MEDIA GROUP, 619 E COLLEGE AVE, STE E, DECATUR, GA 30030. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT DECATUR, GA AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. RIDE-ALONG ENCLOSED IN VERSION 2. **POSTMASTER:** SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO PASTE, P.O. BOX 292382, KETTERING, OH 45429.

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